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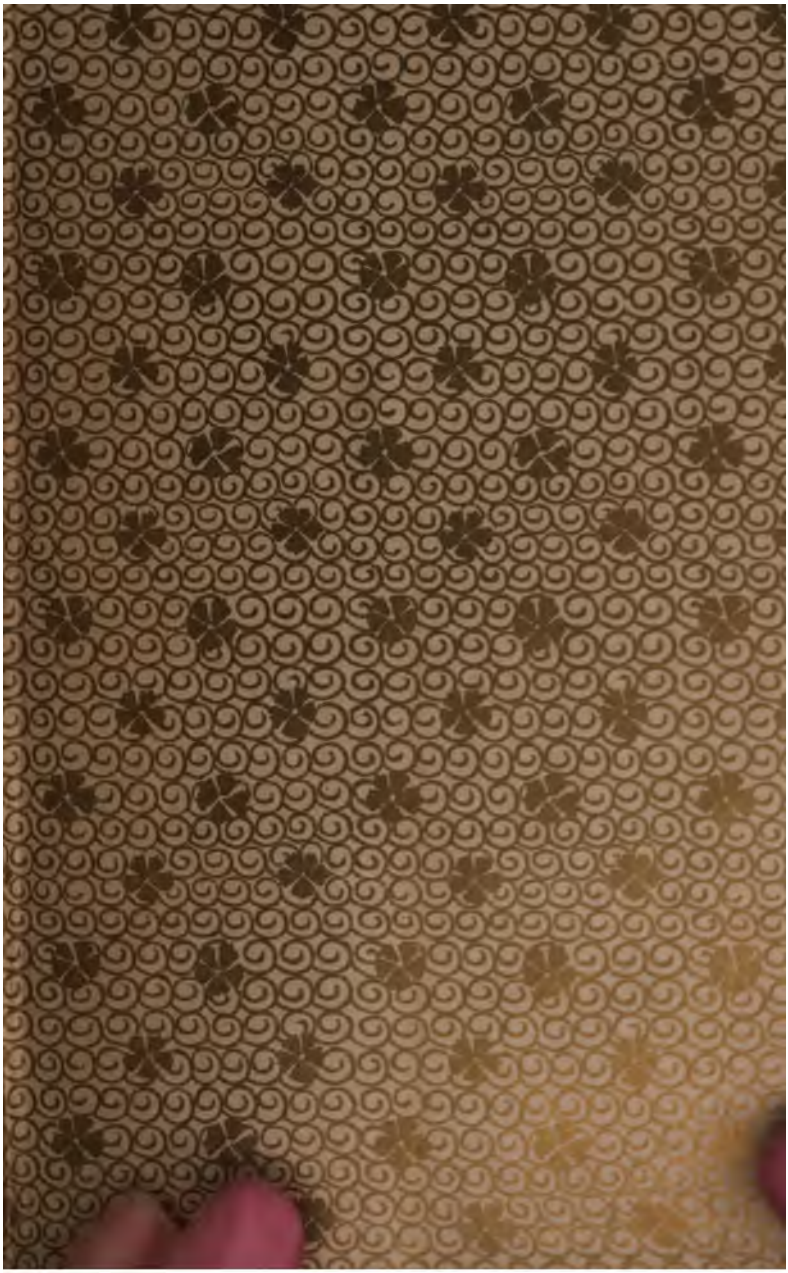

To dear Maŭka from
Margaret -
May 21st 1907 -

VENETIAN LIFE

By WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM ORIGINAL WATER COLORS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VENETIAN LIFE

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
ORIGINAL WATER COLORS

VOLUME
I

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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PREFACE

THE reader who takes up for the first time this account of life in Venice will perhaps be struck by the fact that it continually treats of the city as if it were under the domination of the Austrians. That is because it really was so, twenty six or seven years ago, when the book was written. But this domination ceased, as everybody knows, in 1866; and in 1883, when I revisited Venice, I found no Austrians there in their old quality of masters and oppressors. They had remained there, in spite of history, up to the moment of my arrival, and as soon as my back was turned they came again, and are there yet.

That is the reason why I must let the record stand as it was made. I could not change it without in some ideal sort falsifying it; and I only seek to guard the reader, whom the publishers offer this edition of my

book so long after the first, against its apparent variance with the political facts. In other respects it seems best not to revise it. The book is distinctly a youthful book, for good as well as for ill. I might mend it; but I am afraid I should mar it if I meddled with it. I know its faults as I know the sins of my youth; I am sorry for them, and I hope to be forgiven what it seems too late to undo. But if any one shall say they do not exist, I shall rejoice in his generosity, and I shall not be the first to question his judgment.

W. D. HOWELLS.

September, 1891.

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The aqua-tints were executed by Donald Ramsay, Boston.

VENETIAN LIFE

I

VENICE IN VENICE

ONE night at the little theatre in Padua, the ticket-seller gave us the stage-box (of which he made a great merit), and so we saw the play and the by-play. The prompter, as noted from our point of view, bore a chief part in the drama (as indeed the prompter always does in the Italian theatre), and the scene-shifters appeared as prominent characters. We could not help seeing the virtuous wife, when hotly pursued by the villain of the piece, pause calmly in the wings, before rushing, all tears and desperation, upon the stage; and we were dismayed to behold the injured husband and his abandoned foe playfully scuffling behind the scenes. All the shabbiness of the theatre was perfectly apparent to us; we saw the grossness of the

painting and the unreality of the properties. And yet I cannot say that the play lost one whit of its charm for me, or that the working of the machinery and its inevitable clumsiness disturbed my enjoyment in the least. There was so much truth and beauty in the playing that I did not care for the sham of the ropes and gilding, and presently ceased to take any note of them. The illusion which I had thought an essential in the dramatic spectacle turned out to be a condition of small importance.

It has sometimes seemed to me as if fortune had given me a stage-box at another and grander spectacle, and I had been suffered to see this VENICE, which is to other cities like the pleasant improbability of the theatre to every-day, commonplace life, to much the same effect as that melodrama in Padua. I could not, indeed, dwell three years in the place without learning to know it differently from those writers who have described it in romances, poems, and hurried books of travel, nor help seeing from my point of observation the sham and cheapness with which Venice is usually brought out, if I may so speak, in literature. At the same time, it has never lost for me its claim

upon constant surprise and regard, nor the fascination of its excellent beauty, its peerless picturesqueness, its sole and wondrous grandeur. It is true that the streets in Venice are canals; and yet you can walk to any part of the city, and need not take boat whenever you go out-of-doors, as I once fondly thought you must. But after all, though I find dry land enough in it, I do not find the place less unique, less a mystery, or less a charm. By day, the canals are still the main thoroughfares; and if these avenues are not so full of light and color as some would have us believe, they at least do not smell so offensively as others pretend. And by night they are still as dark and silent as when the secret vengeance of the Republic plunged its victims into the ungossiping depths of the Canalazzo!

Did the vengeance of the Republic ever do any such thing?

Possibly. In Venice one learns not quite to question that reputation for vindictive and gloomy cruelty alien historians have given to a government which endured so many centuries in the willing obedience of its subjects; but to think that the careful student of the old Republican system will condemn

it for faults far different from those for which it is chiefly blamed. At all events, I find it hard to understand why, if the Republic was an oligarchy utterly selfish and despotic, it has left to all classes of Venetians so much regret and sorrow for its fall.

So, if the reader care to follow me to my stage-box, I imagine he will hardly see the curtain rise upon just the Venice of his dreams, — the Venice of Byron, of Rogers, and Cooper; or upon the Venice of his prejudices, — the merciless Venice of Darù, and of the historians who follow him. But I still hope that he will be pleased with the Venice he sees, and will think with me that the place loses little in the illusion removed; and — to take leave of our theatrical metaphor — I promise to fatigue him with no affairs of my own, except as allusion to them may go to illustrate Life in Venice; and positively he shall suffer no annoyance from the fleas and bugs which, in Latin countries, so often get from travellers' beds into their books.

Let us mention here at the beginning some of the sentimental errors concerning the place, with which we need not trouble ourselves hereafter, but which no doubt form

a large part of every one's associations with the name of Venice. Let us take, for example, that pathetic swindle, the Bridge of Sighs. There are few, I fancy, who will hear it mentioned without connecting its mystery and secrecy with the taciturn justice of the Three, or some other cruel machinery of the Serenest Republic's policy. When I entered it the first time I was at the pains to call about me the sad company of those who had passed its corridors from imprisonment to death; and, I doubt not, many excellent tourists have done the same. I was somewhat ashamed to learn afterward that I had, on this occasion, been in very low society, and that the melancholy assemblage which I then conjured up was composed entirely of honest rogues, who might indeed have given as graceful and ingenious excuses for being in misfortune as the galley-slaves rescued by Don Quixote, — who might even have been very picturesque, — but who were not at all the material with which a well-regulated imagination would deal. The Bridge of Sighs was not built till the end of the sixteenth century, and no romantic episode of political imprisonment and punishment (except that of Antonio Foscarini)

occurs in Venetian history later than that period. But the Bridge of Sighs could have nowise a savor of sentiment from any such episode, being, as it was, merely a means of communication between the Criminal Courts sitting in the Ducal Palace and the Criminal Prison across the little canal. Housebreakers, cut-purse knaves, and murderers do not commonly impart a poetic interest to places which have known them; and yet these are the only sufferers on whose Bridge of Sighs the whole sentimental world has looked with pathetic sensation ever since Byron drew attention to it. The name of the bridge was given by the people from that opulence of compassion which enables the Italians to pity even rascality in difficulties.[1]

[1] The reader will remember that Mr. Ruskin has said in a few words, much better than I have said in many, the same thing of sentimental errors about Venice: —

"The Venice of modern fiction and drama is a thing of yesterday, a mere efflorescence of decay, a stage-dream, which the first ray of daylight must dissipate into dust. No prisoner whose name is worth remembering, or whose sorrows deserved sympathy, ever crossed that Bridge of Sighs which is the centre of the Byronic ideal of Venice; no great merchant of Venice ever saw that Rialto under which the traveller now pauses with breathless interest; the statue which Byron makes Faliero address as one of his great ancestors was erected to a soldier of fortune a hundred and fifty years after Faliero's death." — *Stones of Venice.*

Political offenders were not confined in the " prison on each hand " of the poet, but in the famous *pozzi* (literally, wells) or dungeons under the Ducal Palace. And what fables concerning these cells have not been uttered and believed! For my part, I prepared my coldest chills for their exploration, and I am not sure that before I entered their gloom some foolish and lying literature was not shaping itself in my mind, to be afterward written out as my Emotions on looking at them. I do not say now that they are calculated to enamor the unimpounded spectator with prison-life; but they are certainly far from being as bad as I hoped. They are not joyously light nor particularly airy, but their occupants could have suffered no extreme physical discomfort; and the thick wooden casing of the interior walls evidences at least the intention of the state to inflict no wanton hardships of cold and damp.

But on whose account had I to be interested in the *pozzi?* It was difficult to learn, unless I took the word of sentimental hearsay. I began with Marin Falier, but history would not permit the doge to languish in these dungeons for a moment. He was im-

prisoned in the apartments of state, and during one night only. His fellow-conspirators were hanged nearly as fast as taken.

Failing so signally with Falier, I tried several other political prisoners of sad and famous memory with scarcely better effect. To a man, they struggled to shun the illustrious captivity designed them, and escaped from the *pozzi* by every artifice of fact and figure.

The Carraras of Padua were put to death in the city of Venice, and their story is the most pathetic and romantic in Venetian history. But it was not the cells under the Ducal Palace which witnessed their cruel taking-off: they were strangled in the prison formerly existing at the top of the palace, called the Torresella.[1] It is possible, however, that Jacopo Foscari may have been confined in the *pozzi* at different times about the middle of the fifteenth century. With his fate alone, then, can the horror of these cells be satisfactorily associated by those who relish the dark romance of Venetian annals; for it is not to be expected that the less tragic fortunes of Carlo Zeno and Vittore Pisani, who may also have been im-

[1] Gallicioli, *Memorie Venete.*

prisoned in the *pozzi*, can move the true sentimentalizer. Certainly, there has been anguish enough in the prisons of the Ducal Palace, but we know little of it by name, and cannot confidently relate it to any great historic presence.

Touching the Giant's Stairs in the court of the palace, the inexorable dates would not permit me to rest in the delusion that the head of Marin Falier had once bloodily stained them as it rolled to the ground — at the end of Lord Byron's tragedy. Nor could I keep unimpaired my vision of the Chief of the Ten brandishing the sword of justice, as he proclaimed the traitor's death to the people from between the two red columns in the southern gallery of the palace; — that façade was not built till nearly a century later.

I suppose — always judging by my own average experience — that, besides these gloomy associations, the name of Venice will conjure up scenes of brilliant and wanton gayety, and that in the foreground of the brightest picture will be the Carnival of Venice, full of antic delight, romantic adventure, and lawless prank. But the carnival, with all the old merry-making life of the city, is now

utterly obsolete, and, in this way, the conventional, masquerading, pleasure-loving Venice is become as gross a fiction as if, like that other conventional Venice of which I have but spoken, it had never existed. There is no greater social dullness and sadness, on land or sea, than in contemporary Venice.

The causes of this change lie partly in the altered character of the whole world's civilization, partly in the increasing poverty of the city, doomed four hundred years ago to commercial decay, and chiefly (the Venetians would be apt to tell you wholly) in the implacable anger, the inconsolable discontent, with which the people regard their present political condition.

If there be more than one opinion among men elsewhere concerning the means by which Austria acquired Venetia and the tenure by which she holds the province, there would certainly seem to be no division on the question in Venice. To the stranger first inquiring into public feeling, there is something almost sublime in the unanimity with which the Venetians appear to believe that these means were iniquitous, and that this tenure is abominable; and though shrewder study and carefuller observation

will develop some interested attachment to the present government, and some interested opposition to it; though after-knowledge will discover, in the hatred of Austria, enough meanness, lukewarmness, and selfish ignorance to take off its sublimity, the hatred is still found marvellously unanimous and bitter. I speak advisedly, and with no disposition to discuss the question or exaggerate the fact. Exercising at Venice official functions by permission and trust of the Austrian government, I cannot regard the cessation of those functions as release from obligations both to that government and my own, which render it improper for me, so long as the Austrians remain in Venice, to criticise their rule, or contribute, by comment on existing things, to embitter the feeling against them elsewhere. I may, nevertheless, speak dispassionately of facts of the abnormal social and political state of the place; and I can certainly do this, for the present situation is so disagreeable in many ways to the stranger forced to live there, the inappeasable hatred of the Austrians by the Italians is so illiberal in application to those in any wise consorting with them, and so stupid and puerile in many respects, that

I think the annoyance which it gives the foreigner might well damp any passion with which he was disposed to speak of its cause.

This hatred of the Austrians dates in its intensity from the defeat of patriotic hopes of union with Italy, in 1859, when Napoleon found the Adriatic at Peschiera, and the peace of Villafranca was concluded. But it is not to be supposed that a feeling so general, and so thoroughly interwoven with Venetian character, is altogether recent. Consigned to the Austrians by Napoleon I., confirmed in the subjection into which she fell a second time after Napoleon's ruin by the treaties of the Holy Alliance, defeated in several attempts to throw off her yoke, and loaded with heavier servitude after the fall of the short-lived Republic of 1849, Venice has always hated her masters with an exasperation deepened by each remove from the hope of independence, and she now detests them with a rancor which no concession short of absolute relinquishment of dominion would appease.

Instead, therefore, of finding that public gayety and private hospitality in Venice for which the city was once famous, the stranger finds himself planted between two hostile

camps, with merely the choice of sides open to him. Neutrality is solitude and friendship with neither party; society is exclusive association with the Austrians or with the Italians. The latter do not spare one of their own number if he consorts with their masters, and though a foreigner might expect greater allowance, it is seldom shown to him. To be seen in the company of officers is enmity to Venetian freedom, and in the case of Italians it is treason to country and to race. Of course, in a city where there is a large garrison and a great many officers who have nothing else to do, there is inevitably some international love-making, although the Austrian officers are rigidly excluded from association with the citizens. But the Italian who marries an Austrian severs the dearest ties that bind her to life, and remains an exile in the heart of her country. Her friends mercilessly cast her off, as they cast off everybody who associates with the dominant race. In rare cases I have known Italians to receive foreigners who had Austrian friends, but this with the explicit understanding that there was to be no sign of recognition if they met them in the company of these detested acquaintance.

There are all degrees of intensity in Venetian hatred, and after hearing certain persons pour out the gall of bitterness upon the Austrians you may chance to hear these persons spoken of as tepid in their patriotism by yet more fiery haters. Yet it must not be supposed that the Italians hate the Austrians as individuals. On the contrary, they have rather a liking for them, — rather a contemptuous liking, for they think them somewhat slow and dull-witted, — and individually the Austrians are amiable people, and try not to give offence. The government is also very strict in its control of the military. I have never seen the slightest affront offered by a soldier to a citizen; and there is evidently no personal ill-will engendered. The Austrians are simply hated as the means by which an alien and despotic government is imposed upon a people believing themselves born for freedom and independence. This hatred, then, is a feeling purely political, and there is political machinery by which it is kept in a state of perpetual tension.

The Comitato Veneto is a body of Venetians residing within the province and abroad, who have charge of the Italian interests, and who work in every way to pro-

mote union with the dominions of Victor Emanuel. They live for the most part in Venice, where they have a secret press for the publication of their addresses and proclamations, and where they remain unknown to the police, upon whose spies they maintain an espionage. On every occasion of interest, the Committee is sure to make its presence felt; and from time to time persons find themselves in the possession of its printed circulars, stamped with the Committee's seal; but no one knows how or whence they came. Constant arrests of suspected persons are made, but no member of the Committee has yet been identified; and it is said that the mysterious body has its agents in every department of the government, who keep it informed of inimical action. The functions of the Committee are multiplied and various. It takes care that on all patriotic anniversaries (such as that of the establishment of the Republic in 1848, and that of the union of the Italian States under Victor Emanuel in 1860) salutes shall be fired in Venice, and a proper number of red, white, and green lights displayed. It inscribes revolutionary sentiments on the walls; and all attempts on the part of the Austrians to re-

vive popular festivities are frustrated by the Committee, which causes petards to be exploded in the Place of St. Mark and on the different promenades. Even the churches are not exempt from these demonstrations: I was present at the Te Deum performed on the Emperor's birthday, in St. Mark's, when the moment of elevating the host was signalized by the bursting of a petard in the centre of the cathedral. All this, which seems of questionable utility, and worse than questionable taste, is approved by the fiercer of the Italianissimi; and though possibly the strictness of the patriotic discipline in which the members of the Committee keep their fellow-citizens may gall some of them, yet any public demonstration of content, such as going to the opera, or to the Piazza while the Austrian band plays, is promptly discontinued at a warning from the Committee. It is, of course, the Committee's business to keep the world informed of public feeling in Venice, and of each new act of Austrian severity. Its members are inflexible men, whose ability has been as frequently manifested as their patriotism.

The Venetians are now, therefore, a nation in mourning, and have, as I said, disused all

their former pleasures and merry-makings. Every class, except a small part of the resident *titled* nobility (a great part of the nobility is in either forced or voluntary exile), seems to be comprehended by this feeling of despondency and suspense. The poor of the city formerly found their respite and diversion in the numerous holidays which fell in different parts of the year, and which, though religious in their general character, were still inseparably bound up in their origin with ideas of patriotism and national glory. Such of these holidays as related to the victories and pride of the Republic naturally ended with her fall. Many others, however, survived this event in all their splendor, but there is not one celebrated now as in other days. It is true that the churches still parade their pomps in the Piazza on the day of Corpus Christi; it is true that the bridges of boats are still built across the Canalazzo to the church of Our Lady of Salvation, and across the canal of the Giudecca to the temple of the Redeemer, on the respective festivals of these churches; but the concourse is always meagre, and the mirth is forced and ghastly. The Italianissimi have so far imbued the people with their own

ideas and feelings that the recurrence of the famous holidays now merely awakens them to lamentations over the past and vague longings for the future.

As for the carnival, which once lasted six months of the year, charming hither all the idlers of the world by its peculiar splendor and variety of pleasure, it does not, as I said, any longer exist. It is dead, and its shabby, wretched ghost is a party of beggars, hideously dressed out with masks and horns and women's habits, who go from shop to shop droning forth a stupid song, and levying tribute upon the shopkeepers. The crowd through which these melancholy jesters pass regards them with a pensive scorn, and goes about its business untempted by the delights of carnival.

All other social amusements have shared in greater or less degree the fate of the carnival. At some houses *conversazioni* are still held, and it is impossible that balls and parties should not now and then be given. But the greater number of the nobles and the richer of the professional classes lead for the most part a life of listless seclusion, and attempts to lighten the general gloom and heaviness in any way are not looked upon

with favor. By no sort of chance are Austrians, or Austriacanti, ever invited to participate in the pleasures of Venetian society.

As the social life of Italy, and especially of Venice, was, in great part, to be once enjoyed at the theatres, at the *caffè*, and at the other places of public resort, so is its absence now to be chiefly noted in those places. No lady of perfect standing among her people goes to the opera, and the men never go in the boxes, but if they frequent the theatre at all, they take places in the pit, in order that the house may wear as empty and dispirited a look as possible. Occasionally a bomb is exploded in the theatre, as a note of reminder, and as means of keeping away such of the nobles as are not enemies of the government. As it is less easy for the Austrians to participate in the diversion of comedy, it is a less offence to attend the comedy, though even this is not good Italianissimism. In regard to the *caffè*, there is a perfectly understood system by which the Austrians go to one, and the Italians to another; and Florian's, in the Piazza, seems to be the only common ground in the city on which the hostile forces consent to meet. This is because it is thronged with foreigners

of all nations, and to go there is not thought a demonstration of any kind. But the other *caffè* in the Piazza do not enjoy Florian's cosmopolitan immunity, and nothing would create more wonder in Venice than to see an Austrian officer at the Specchi, unless, indeed, it were the presence of a good Italian at the Quadri.

It is in the Piazza that the tacit demonstration of hatred and discontent chiefly takes place. Here, thrice a week, in winter and summer, the military band plays that exquisite music for which the Austrians are famous. The selections are usually from Italian operas, and the attraction is the hardest of all others for the music-loving Italian to resist. But he does resist it. There are some noble ladies who have not entered the Piazza, while the band was playing there, since the fall of the Republic of 1849; and none of good standing for patriotism has attended the concerts since the treaty of Villafranca in '59. Until very lately, the promenaders in the Piazza were exclusively foreigners, or else the families of such government officials as were obliged to show themselves there. Last summer, however, before the Franco-Italian convention for the

evacuation of Rome revived the drooping hopes of the Venetians, they had begun visibly to falter in their long endurance. But this was, after all, only a slight and transient weakness. As a general thing, now, they pass from the Piazza when the music begins, and walk upon the long quay at the sea-side of the Ducal Palace; or if they remain in the Piazza they pace up and down under the arcades on either side; for Venetian patriotism makes a delicate distinction between listening to the Austrian band in the Piazza and hearing it under the Procuratie, forbidding the first and permitting the last. As soon as the music ceases the Austrians disappear, and the Italians return to the Piazza.

But since the catalogue of demonstrations cannot be made full, it need not be made any longer. The political feeling in Venice affects her prosperity in a far greater degree than may appear to those who do not understand how large an income the city formerly derived from making merry. The poor have to lament not merely the loss of their holidays, but also of the fat employments and bountiful largess which these occasions threw into their hands. With the exile or the

seclusion of the richer families, and the reluctance of foreigners to make a residence of the gloomy and dejected city, the trade of the shopkeepers has fallen off; the larger commerce of the place has also languished and dwindled year by year; while the cost of living has constantly increased, and heavier burdens of taxation have been laid upon the impoverished and despondent people. And in all this, Venice is but a type of the whole province of Venetia.

The alien life to be found in the city is scarcely worth noting. The Austrians have a *casino*, and they give balls and parties, and now and then make some public manifestation of gayety. But they detest Venice as a place of residence, being naturally averse to living in the midst of a people who shun them like a pestilence. Other foreigners, as I said, are obliged to take sides for or against the Venetians, and it is amusing enough to find the few English residents divided into Austriacanti and Italianissimi.[1] Even the consuls of the different nations, who are in every way bound to

[1] Austriacanti are people of Austrian politics, though not of Austrian birth. Italianissimi are those who favor union with Italy at any cost.

neutrality and indifference, are popularly reputed to be of one party or the other; and my predecessor, whose unhappy knowledge of German threw him on his arrival among people of that race, was always regarded as the enemy of Venetian freedom, though I believe his principles were of the most vivid republican tint in the United States.

The present situation has now endured five years, with only slight modifications by time, and only faint murmurs from some of the more impatient, that *bisogna, una volta o l' altra, romper il chiodo* (sooner or later the nail must be broken). As the Venetians are a people of indomitable perseverance, long schooled to obstinacy by oppression, I suppose they will hold out till their union with the kingdom of Italy. They can do nothing of themselves, but they seem content to wait forever in their present gloom. How deeply their attitude affects their national character I shall inquire hereafter, when I come to look somewhat more closely at the spirit of their demonstration.

For the present, it is certain that the discontent of the people has its peculiar effect upon the city as the stranger sees its life, casting a glamour over it all, making it more

and more ghostly and sad, and giving it a pathetic charm which I would fain transfer to my pages; but failing that, would pray the reader to remember as a fact to which I must be faithful in all my descriptions of Venice.

II

ARRIVAL AND FIRST DAYS IN VENICE

I THINK it does not matter just when I first came to Venice. Yesterday and to-day are the same here. I arrived one winter morning about five o'clock, and was not so full of Soul as I might have been in warmer weather. Yet I was resolved not to go to my hotel in the omnibus (the large, many-seated boat so called), but to have a gondola solely for myself and my luggage. The porter who seized my valise in the station inferred from some very polyglottic Italian of mine the nature of my wish, and ran out and threw that slender piece of luggage into a gondola. I followed, lighted to my seat by a beggar in picturesque and desultory costume. He was one of a class of mendicants whom I came, for my sins, to know better in Venice, and whom I dare say every traveller recollects, — the merciless tribe who hold your gondola to shore, and affect to do you a service and not a displeasure,

and pretend not to be abandoned swindlers. The Venetians call them *gransieri*, or crab-catchers; but as yet I did not know the name or the purpose of this *poverino*[1] at the station, but merely saw that he had the Venetian eye for color: in the distribution and arrangement of his fragments of dress he had produced some miraculous effects of red, and he was altogether as infamous a figure as any friend of brigands would like to meet in a lonely place. He did not offer to stab me and sink my body in the Grand Canal, as, in all Venetian keeping, I felt that he ought to have done; but he implored an alms, and I hardly know now whether to exult or regret that I did not understand him, and left him empty-handed. I suppose that he withdrew again the blessings which he had advanced me, as we pushed out into the canal; but I heard nothing, for the wonder of the city was already upon me. All my nether-spirit, so to speak, was dulled and jaded by the long, cold railway journey from Vienna, while every surface-sense was taken and tangled in the bewildering bril-

[1] *Poverino* is the compassionate generic for all unhappy persons who work for a living in Venice, as well as many who decline to do so.

liancy and novelty of Venice. For I think there can be nothing else in the world so full of glittering and exquisite surprise as that first glimpse of Venice which the traveller catches as he issues from the railway station by night, and looks upon her peerless strangeness. There is something in the blessed breath of Italy (how quickly, coming south, you know it, and how bland it is, after the harsh, transalpine air!) which prepares you for your nocturnal advent into the place; and O you! whoever you are, that journey toward this enchanted city for the first time, let me tell you how happy I count you! There lies before you for your pleasure the spectacle of such singular beauty as no picture can ever show you nor book tell you, — beauty which you shall feel perfectly but once, and regret forever.

For my own part, as the gondola slipped away from the blaze and bustle of the station down the gloom and silence of the broad canal, I forgot that I had been freezing two days and nights; that I was at that moment very cold and a little homesick. I could at first feel nothing but that beautiful silence, broken only by the star-silvered dip of the oars. Then on either hand I saw

stately palaces rise gray and lofty from the dark waters, holding here and there a lamp against their faces, which brought balconies and columns and carven arches into momentary relief, and threw long streams of crimson into the canal. I could see by that uncertain glimmer how fair was all, but not how sad and old; and so, unhaunted by any pang for the decay that afterward saddened me amid the forlorn beauty of Venice, I glided on. I have no doubt it was a proper time to think all the fantastic things in the world, and I thought them; but they passed vaguely through my mind, without at all interrupting the sensations of sight and sound. Indeed, the past and present mixed there, and the moral and material were blent in the sentiment of utter novelty and surprise. The quick boat slid through old troubles of mine, and unlooked-for events gave it the impulse that carried it beyond, and safely around sharp corners of life. And all the while I knew that this was a progress through narrow and crooked canals, and past marble angles of palaces. But I did not know then that this fine confusion of sense and spirit was the first faint impression of the charm of life in Venice.

Dark, funereal barges like my own had flitted by, and the gondoliers had warned each other at every turning with hoarse, lugubrious cries; the lines of balconied palaces had never ended; — here and there at their doors larger craft were moored, with dim figures of men moving uncertainly about on them. At last we had passed abruptly out of the Grand Canal into one of the smaller channels, and from comparative light into a darkness only remotely affected by some far-streaming corner lamp. But always the pallid, stately palaces; always the dark heaven with its trembling stars above, and the dark water with its trembling stars below; but now innumerable bridges, and an utter lonesomeness, and ceaseless sudden turns and windings. One could not resist a vague feeling of anxiety, in these strait and solitary passages, which was part of the strange enjoyment of the time, and which was referable to the novelty, the hush, the darkness, and the piratical appearance and unaccountable pauses of the gondoliers. Was not this Venice, and is not Venice forever associated with bravoes and unexpected dagger-thrusts? That valise of mine might represent fabulous wealth to the uncultivated

imagination. Who, if I made an outcry, could understand the Facts of the Situation (as we say in the journals)? To move on was relief; to pause was regret for past transgressions mingled with good resolutions for the future. But I felt the liveliest mixture of all these emotions, when, slipping from the cover of a bridge, the gondola suddenly rested at the foot of a stairway before a closely-barred door. The gondoliers rang and rang again, while their passenger

"Divided the swift mind,"

in the wonder whether a door so grimly bolted and austerely barred could possibly open into a hotel, with cheerful overcharges for candles and service. But as soon as the door opened, and he beheld the honest swindling countenance of a hotel *portier*, he felt secure against everything but imposture, and all wild absurdities of doubt and conjecture at once faded from his thought when the *portier* suffered the gondoliers to make him pay a florin too much.

So, I had arrived in Venice, and I had felt the influence of that complex spell which she lays upon the stranger. I had caught the most alluring glimpses of the beauty which cannot wholly perish while any frag-

ment of her sculptured walls nods to its shadow in the canal; I had been penetrated by a deep sense of the mystery of the place, and I had been touched already by the anomaly of modern life amid scenes where its presence offers, according to the humor in which it is studied, constant occasion for annoyance or delight, enthusiasm or sadness.

I fancy that the ignorant impressions of the earlier days after my arrival need scarcely be set down even in this perishable record; but I would not wholly forget how, though isolated from all acquaintance and alien to the place, I yet felt curiously at home in Venice from the first. I believe it was because I had, after my own fashion, loved the beautiful that I here found the beautiful, where it is supreme, full of society and friendship, speaking a language which, even in its unfamiliar forms, I could partly understand, and at once making me citizen of that Venice from which I shall never be exiled. It was not in the presence of the great and famous monuments of art alone that I felt at home, — indeed, I could as yet understand their excellence and grandeur only very imperfectly, — but wherever I wandered

A Dark and Secret Court

light in proper Objects of Interest than in the dirty neighborhoods that reeked with unwholesome winter damps below, and peered curiously out with frowzy heads and beautiful eyes from the high, heavy-shuttered casements above. Every court had its carven well to show me, in the noisy keeping of the water-carriers and the slatternly, statuesque gossips of the place. The remote and noisome canals were pathetic with empty old palaces peopled by herds of poor, that decorated the sculptured balconies with the tatters of epicene linen, and patched the lofty windows with obsolete hats.

I found the night as full of beauty as the day, when caprice led me from the brilliancy of St. Mark's and the glittering streets of shops that branch away from the Piazza, and lost me in the quaint recesses of the courts or the tangles of the distant alleys, where the dull little oil-lamps vied with the tapers burning before the street-corner shrines of the Virgin[1] in making the way obscure, and deepening the shadows about the doorways and under the frequent arches. I remember distinctly, among the beautiful

[1] In the early times these tapers were the sole means of street illumination in Venice.

nights of that time, the soft night of late winter, which first showed me the scene you may behold from the Public Gardens at the end of the long concave line of the Riva degli Schiavoni. Lounging there upon the southern parapet of the Gardens, I turned from the dim bell-towers of the evanescent islands in the east (a solitary gondola gliding across the calm of the water and striking its moonlight silver into multitudinous ripples), and glanced athwart the vague shipping in the basin of St. Mark, and saw all the lights from the Piazzetta to the Giudecca, making a crescent of flame in the air, and casting deep into the water under them a crimson glory that sank also down and down in my own heart, and illumined all its memories of beauty and delight. Behind these lamps rose the shadowy masses of church and palace; the moon stood bright and full in the heavens; the gondola drifted away to the northward; the islands of the lagoons seemed to rise and sink with the light palpitations of the waves like pictures on the undulating fields of banners; the stark rigging of a ship showed black against the sky; the Lido sank from sight upon the east, as if the shore had composed itself to

sleep by the side of its beloved sea, to the music of the surge that gently beat its sands; the yet leafless boughs of the trees above me stirred themselves together, and out of one of those trembling towers in the lagoons one rich, full sob burst from the heart of a bell, too deeply stricken with the glory of the scene, and suffused the languid night with the murmur of luxurious, ineffable sadness.

But there is a perfect democracy in the realm of the beautiful, and whatsoever pleases is equal to any other thing there, no matter how low its origin or humble its composition; and the magnificence of that moonlight scene gave me no deeper joy than I won from the fine spectacle of an old man whom I saw burning coffee one night in the little court behind my lodgings, and whom I recollect now as one of the most interesting people I saw in my first days at Venice. All day long the air of that neighborhood had reeked with the odors of the fragrant berry, and all day long this patient old man — sage, let me call him — had turned the sheet-iron cylinder in which it was roasting over an open fire, after the picturesque fashion of roasting coffee in Venice. Now that the night had fallen, and the stars shone

down upon him, and the red of the flame luridly illumined him, he showed more grand and venerable than ever. Simple, abstract humanity has its own grandeur in Italy, and it is not hard here for the artist to find the primitive types with which genius loves best to deal. As for this old man, he had the beard of a saint and the dignity of a senator, harmonized with the squalor of a beggar, superior to which shone his abstract, unconscious grandeur of humanity. A vast and calm melancholy, which had nothing to do with burning coffee, dwelt in his aspect and attitude; and if he had been some dread supernatural agency, turning the wheel of fortune, and doing men, instead of coffee, brown, he could not have looked more sadly and weirdly impressive. When, presently, he rose from his seat, and lifted the cylinder from its place, and the clinging flames leaped after it, and he shook it, and a volume of luminous smoke enveloped him and glorified him, then I felt with secret anguish that he was beyond art, and turned sadly from the spectacle of that sublime and hopeless magnificence.

At other times (but this was in broad daylight) I was troubled by the æsthetic

perfection of a certain ruffian boy, who sold cakes of baked Indian meal to the soldiers in the military station near the Piazza, and whom I often noted from the windows of the little *caffè* there, where you get an excellent *caffè bianco* (coffee with milk) for ten soldi and one to the waiter. I have reason to fear that this boy dealt over-shrewdly with the Austrians, for a pitiless war raged between him and one of the sergeants. His hair was dark, his cheek was of a bronze better than olive, and he wore a brave cap of red flannel, drawn down to eyes of lustrous black. For the rest, he gave unity and coherence to a jacket and pantaloons of heterogeneous elements, and, such was the elasticity of his spirit, a buoyant grace to feet encased in wooden shoes. Habitually came a barrel-organist, and ground before the barracks, and

> "Took the soul
> Of that waste place with joy;"

and ever, when this organist came to a certain lively waltz, and threw his whole soul, as it were, into the crank of his instrument, my beloved ragamuffin failed not to seize another cake-boy in his arms, and, thus embraced, to whirl through a wild inspiration

of figures, in which there was something grotesquely rhythmic, something of indescribable barbaric magnificence, spiritualized into a grace of movement superior to the energy of the North and the extravagant fervor of the East. It was coffee, and not wine, that I drank, but I fable all the same that I saw reflected in this superb and artistic superation of the difficulties of dancing in that unfriendly foot-gear something of the same genius that combated and vanquished the elements, to build its home upon sea-washed sands in marble structures of airy and stately splendor, and gave to architecture new glories full of eternal surprise.

So, I say, I grew early into sympathy and friendship with Venice, and, being newly from a land where everything, morally and materially, was in good repair, I rioted sentimentally on the picturesque ruin, the pleasant discomfort and hopelessness of everything about me here. It was not yet the season to behold all the delight of the lazy, out-door life of the place; but nevertheless I could not help seeing that a great part of the people, both rich and poor, seemed to have nothing to do, and that nobody seemed

driven by any inward or outward impulse. When, however, I ceased (as I must in time) to be merely a spectator of this idleness, and learned that I too must assume my share of the common indolence, I found it a grievous burden. Old habits of work, old habits of hope, made my endless leisure irksome to me, and almost intolerable when I ascertained fairly and finally that, in my desire to fulfil long-cherished but, after all, merely general designs of literary study, I had forsaken wholesome struggle in the currents where I felt the motion of the age, only to drift into a lifeless eddy of the world, remote from incentive and sensation.

For such is Venice, and the will must be strong and the faith indomitable in him who can long retain, amid the influences of her stagnant quiet, a practical belief in God's purpose of a great moving, anxious, toiling, aspiring world outside. When you have yielded, as after a while I yielded, to these influences, a gentle incredulity possesses you; and if you consent that such a thing is as earnest and useful life, you cannot help wondering why it need be. The charm of the place sweetens your temper, but corrupts you; and I found it a sad condition of my

perception of the beauty of Venice and friendship with it that I came in some unconscious way to regard her fate as my own; and when I began to write the sketches which go to form this book, it was as hard to speak of any ugliness in her, or of the doom written against her in the hieroglyphic seams and fissures of her crumbling masonry, as if the fault and penalty were mine. I do not so greatly blame, therefore, the writers who have committed so many sins of omission concerning her, and made her all light, color, canals, and palaces. One's conscience, more or less uncomfortably vigilant elsewhere, drowses here, and it is difficult to remember that fact is more virtuous than fiction. In other years, when there was life in the city, and this sad ebb of prosperity was full tide in her canals, there might have been some incentive to keep one's thoughts and words from lapsing into habits of luxurious dishonesty, some reason for telling the whole hard truth of things, some policy to serve, some end to gain. But now, what matter?

III

THE WINTER IN VENICE

IT was winter, as I said, when I first came to Venice, and my experiences of the city were not all purely æsthetic. There was, indeed, an every-day roughness and discomfort in the weather, which travellers passing their first winter in Italy find it hard to reconcile with the habitual ideas of the season's clemency in the South. But winter is apt to be very severe in mild climates. People do not acknowledge it, making a wretched pretence that it is summer only a little out of humor.

The Germans have introduced stoves at Venice, but they are not in much favor with the Italians, who think their heat unwholesome, and endure a degree of cold, in their wish to dispense with fire, which we of the winter-lands know nothing of in our houses. They pay for their absurd prejudice with terrible chilblains; and their hands, which suffer equally with their feet, are, in the case of those most exposed to the cold, objects

pitiable and revolting to behold when the itching and the effort to allay it has turned them into bloated masses of sores. It is not a pleasant thing to speak of; and the constant sight of the affliction among people who bring you bread, cut you cheese, and weigh you out sugar by no means reconciles the Northern stomach to its prevalence. I have observed that priests and those who have much to do in the frigid churches are the worst sufferers in this way; and I think no one can help noting in the harsh, raw winter-complexion (for in summer the tone is quite different) of the women of all classes the protest of systems cruelly starved of the warmth which health demands.

The houses are, naturally enough in this climate, where there are eight months of summer in the year, all built with a view to coolness in summer, and the rooms which are not upon the ground-floor are very large, lofty, and cold. In the palaces, indeed, there are two suites of apartments, — the smaller and cozier suite upon the first floor for the winter, and the grander and airier chambers and saloons above, for defence against the insidious heats of the sirocco. But, for the most part, people must occupy

the same room summer and winter, the sole change being in the strip of carpet laid meagrely before the sofa during the latter season. In the comparatively few houses where carpets are the rule, and not the exception, they are always removed during the summer, — for the triple purpose of sparing them some months' wear, banishing fleas and other domestic insects, and showing off the beauty of the oiled and shining pavement, which in the meanest houses is tasteful, and in many of the better sort is often inwrought with figures and designs of mosaic work. All the floors in Venice are of stone; and whether of marble flags, or of that species of composition formed of dark cement, with fragments of colored marble imbedded, and smoothed and polished to the most glassy and even surface, and the general effect and complexion of petrified plum-pudding, all the floors are death-cold in winter. People sit with their feet upon cushions, and their bodies muffled in furs and wadded gowns. When one goes out into the sun, one often finds an overcoat too heavy, but it never gives warmth enough in the house, where the Venetian sometimes wears it. Indeed, the sun is recognized by Venetians as the

only legitimate source of heat, and they sell his favor at fabulous prices to such foreigners as take the lodgings into which he shines.

It is those who remain in-doors, therefore, who are exposed to the utmost rigor of the winter, and people spend as much of their time as possible in the open air. The Riva degli Schiavoni catches the warm afternoon sun in its whole extent, and is then thronged with promenaders of every class, condition, age, and sex; and whenever the sun shines in the Piazza, shivering fashion eagerly courts its favor. At night men crowd the close little *caffè*, where they reciprocate smoke, respiration, and animal heat, and thus temper the inclemency of the weather, and beguile the time with solemn loafing[1] and the perusal of dingy little journals, drinking small cups of black coffee, and playing long games of chess, — an evening that seemed to me as torpid and lifeless as a Lap's, and intolerable when I remembered the bright, social winter evenings of another and happier land and civilization.

[1] I permit myself, throughout this book, the use of the expressive American words *loaf* and *loafer*, as the only terms adequate to the description of professional idling in Venice.

Sometimes you find a heated stove — that is to say, one in which there has been a fire during the day — in a Venetian house; but the stove seems usually to be placed in the room for ornament, or else to be engaged only in diffusing a very acrid smoke, — as if the Venetian preferred to take warmth, as other people do snuff, by inhalation. The stove itself is a curious structure, and built commonly of bricks and plastering, — white-washed and painted outside. It is a great consumer of fuel, and radiates but little heat. By dint of constant wooding I contrived to warm mine; but my Italian friends always avoided its vicinity when they came to see me, and most amusingly regarded my determination to be comfortable as part of the eccentricity inseparable from the Anglo-Saxon character.

I dare say they would not trifle with winter thus, if they knew him in his northern moods. But the only voluntary concession they make to his severity is the *scaldino*, and this is made chiefly by the yielding sex, who are denied the warmth of the *caffè*. The use of the *scaldino* is known to all ranks, but it is the women of the poorer orders who are most addicted to it. The

scaldino is a small pot of glazed earthenware, having an earthen bale: and with this handle passed over the arm, and the pot full of bristling charcoal, the Veneziana's defence against cold is complete. She carries her *scaldino* with her in the house from room to room, and takes it with her into the street; and it has often been my fortune in the churches to divide my admiration between the painting over the altar and the poor old crone kneeling before it, who, while she sniffed and whispered a gelid prayer, and warmed her heart with religion, baked her dirty palms in the carbonic fumes of the *scaldino*. In one of the public bath-houses in Venice there are four prints upon the walls, intended to convey to the minds of the bathers a poetical idea of the four seasons. There is nothing remarkable in the symbolization of Spring, Summer, and Autumn; but Winter is nationally represented by a fine lady dressed in furred robes, with her feet upon a cushioned footstool and a *scaldino* in her lap! When we talk of being invaded in the north, we poetize the idea of defence by the figure of defending our hearthstones. Alas! *could* we fight for our sacred *scaldini?*

Happy are the men who bake chestnuts, and sell hot pumpkins and pears, for they can unite pleasure and profit. There are some degrees of poverty below the standard of the *scaldino*, and the beggars and the wretcheder poor keep themselves warm, I think, by sultry recollections of summer, as Don Quixote proposed to subsist upon savory remembrances, during one of his periods of fast. One mendicant whom I know, and who always sits upon the steps of a certain bridge, succeeds, I believe, as the season advances, in heating the marble beneath him by firm and unswerving adhesion, and establishes a reciprocity of warmth with it. I have no reason to suppose that he ever deserts his seat for a moment during the whole winter; and indeed, it would be a vicious waste of comfort to do so.

In the winter, the whole city *sniffs*, and if the Pipchin theory of the effect of sniffing upon the eternal interests of the soul be true, few people go to heaven from Venice. I sometimes wildly wondered if Desdemona, in *her* time, sniffed, and found little comfort in the reflection that Shylock must have had a cold in his head. There is comparative warmth in the broad squares before the

churches, but the narrow streets are bitter thorough-draughts, and fell influenza lies in wait for its prey in all those picturesque, seducing little courts of which I have spoken.

It is, however, in the churches, whose cool twilight and airy height one finds so grateful in summer, that the sharpest malice of the winter is felt; and having visited a score of them soon after my arrival, I deferred the remaining seventy-five or eighty, together with the gallery of the Academy, until advancing spring should in some degree have mitigated the severity of their temperature. As far as my imagination affected me, I thought the Gothic churches much more tolerable than the temples of Renaissance art. The empty bareness of these, with their huge marbles and their soulless splendors of theatrical sculpture, their frescoed roofs and broken arches, was insufferable. The arid grace of Palladio's architecture was especially grievous to the sense in cold weather; and I warn the traveller who goes to see the lovely Madonnas of Bellini to beware how he trusts himself in winter to the gusty, arctic magnificence of the church of the Redentore. But by all

means the coldest church in the city is that of the Jesuits, which those who have seen it will remember for its famous marble drapery. This base, mechanical surprise (for it is a trick, and not art) is effected by inlaying the white marble of columns and pulpits and altars with a certain pattern of verd-antique. The workmanship is marvellously skilful and the material costly, but it only gives the church the effect of being draped in damask linen; and even where the marble is carven in vast and heavy folds over a pulpit to simulate a curtain, or wrought in figures on the steps of the high altar to represent a carpet, it has no richness of effect, but a poverty, a coldness, a harshness, indescribably table-clothy. I think all this has tended to chill the soul of the sacristan, who is the feeblest and thinnest sacristan conceivable, with a frost of white hair on his temples quite incapable of thawing. In this dreary sanctuary is one of Titian's great paintings, The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence, to which (though it is so cunningly disposed as to light that no one ever yet saw the whole picture at once) you turn involuntarily, envious of the Saint toasting so comfortably on his grid-iron amid all that frigidity.

The Venetians pretend that many of the late winters have been much severer than those of former years, but I think this pretence has less support in fact than in the custom of mankind everywhere to claim that such weather as the present, whatever it happens to be, was never seen before. In fine, the winter climate of North Italy is really very harsh, and though the season is not so severe in Venice as in Milan, or even Florence, it is still so sharp as to make foreigners regret the generous fires and warmly-built houses of the north. There was snow but once during my first Venetian winter, 1861–62; the second there was none at all; but the third, which was last winter, it fell repeatedly to considerable depth, and lay unmelted for many weeks in the shade. The lagoons were frozen for miles in every direction; and under our windows on the Grand Canal great sheets of ice went up and down with the rising and the falling tide for nearly a whole month. The visible misery throughout the fireless city was great; and it was a problem I never could solve, whether people in-doors were greater sufferers from the cold than those who weathered the cruel winds sweeping the squares and the canals, and

whistling through the streets of stone and brine. The boys had an unwonted season of sliding on the frozen lagoons, though a good deal persecuted by the police, who must have looked upon such a tremendous innovation as little better than revolution; and it was said that there were card-parties on the ice; but the only creatures which seemed really to enjoy the weather were the sea-gulls. These birds, which flock into the city in vast numbers at the first approach of cold, and, sailing up and down the canals between the palaces, bring to the dwellers in the city a full sense of mid-ocean forlornness and desolation, now rioted on the savage winds with harsh cries, and danced upon the waves of the bitter brine with a clamorous joy that had something eldritch and unearthly in it.

A place so much given to gossip as Venice did not fail to produce many memorable incidents of the cold; but the most singular adventure was that of the old man employed at the Armenian Convent to bring milk from the island of San Lazzaro to the city. One night, shortly after the coldest weather set in, he lost his oar as he was returning to the island. The wind, which is particularly

furious in that part of the lagoon, blew his boat away into the night, and the good brothers at the convent naturally gave up their milkman for lost. The winds and waters drifted him eight miles from the city into the northern lagoon, and there lodged his boat in the marshes, where it froze fast in the stiffening mud. The luckless occupant had nothing to eat or drink in his boat, where he remained five days and nights, exposed to the inclemency of cold many degrees below friendship in severity. He made continual signs of distress, but no boat came near enough to discover him. At last, when the whole marsh was frozen solid, he was taken off by some fishermen, and carried to the convent, where he remains in perfectly recovered health, and where no doubt he will be preserved alive many years in an atmosphere which renders dying at San Lazzaro a matter of no small difficulty. During the whole time of his imprisonment, he sustained life against hunger and cold by smoking. I suppose no one will be surprised to learn that he was rescued by the fishermen through the miraculous interposition of the Madonna, — as any one might have seen by the votive picture hung up at her shrine on a bridge of

the Riva degli Schiavoni, wherein the Virgin was represented breaking through the clouds in one corner of the sky, and unmistakably directing the operations of the fishermen.

It is said that no such winter as that of 1863–64 has been known in Venice since the famous *Anno del Ghiaccio* (Year of the Ice), which fell about the beginning of the last century. This year is celebrated in the local literature; the play which commemorates it always draws full houses at the people's theatre, Malibran; and the often-copied picture, by a painter of the time, representing Lustrissime and Lustrissimi in hoops and bag-wigs on the ice, never fails to block up the street before the shop-window in which it is exposed. The King of Denmark was then the guest of the Republic, and as the unprecedented cold defeated all the plans arranged for his diversion, the pleasure-loving government turned the cold itself to account, and made the ice occasion of novel brilliancy in its festivities. The duties on commerce between the city and the mainland were suspended for as long time as the lagoon should remain frozen, and the ice became a scene

of the liveliest traffic, and was everywhere covered with sledges, bringing the produce of the country to the capital, and carrying away its stuffs in return. The Venetians of every class amused themselves in visiting this free mart, and the gentler and more delicate sex pressed eagerly forward to traverse with their feet a space hitherto passable only in gondolas.[1] The lagoon remained frozen, and these pleasures lasted eighteen days, a period of cold unequalled till last winter. A popular song now declares that the present generation has known a winter quite as marvellous as that of the Year of the Ice, and celebrates the wonder of walking on the water: —

Che bell' affar!
Che patetico affar!
Che immenso affar!
Sora l'acqua camminar!

But after all, the disagreeable winter, which hardly commences before Christmas, and which ends about the middle of March, is but a small part of the glorious Venetian year; and even this ungracious season has a loveliness, at times, which it can have nowhere but in Venice. What summer-delight

1 *Origine delle Feste Veneziane*, di Giustina Renier-Michiel.

of other lands could match the beauty of the first Venetian snow-fall which I saw? It had snowed overnight, and in the morning when I woke it was still snowing. The flakes fell softly and vertically through the motionless air, and all the senses were full of languor and repose. It was rapture to lie still, and after a faint glimpse of the golden-winged angel on the bell-tower of St. Mark's to give indolent eyes solely to the contemplation of the roof opposite, where the snow lay half an inch deep upon the brown tiles. The little scene — a few square yards of roof, a chimney-pot, and a dormer-window — was all that the most covetous spirit could demand; and I lazily lorded it over that domain of pleasure, while the lingering mists of a dream of new-world events blent themselves with the luxurious humor of the moment and the calm of the snow-fall, and made my reverie one of the perfectest things in the world. When I was lost the deepest in it, I was inexpressibly touched and gratified by the appearance of a black cat at the dormer-window. In Venice, roofs commanding pleasant exposures seem to be chiefly devoted to the cultivation of this animal, and there are many cats in

Venice. My black cat looked wondering upon the snow for a moment, and then ran across the roof. Nothing could have been better. Any creature less silent, or in point of movement less soothing to the eye, than a cat would have been torture of the spirit. As it was, this little piece of action contented me so well that I left everything else out of my reverie, and could only think how deliciously the cat harmonized with the snow-covered tiles, the chimney-pot, and the dormer-window. I began to long for her reappearance, but when she did come forth, and repeat her manœuvre, I ceased to have the slightest interest in the matter, and experienced only the disgust of satiety. I had felt *ennui*, — nothing remained but to get up and change my relations with the world.

In Venetian streets they give the fallen snow no rest. It is at once shovelled into the canals by hundreds of half-naked *facchini*;[1] and now in St. Mark's Place the music of innumerable shovels smote upon my ear, and I saw the shivering legion of

[1] The term for those idle people in Italian cities who relieve long seasons of repose by occasionally acting as messengers, porters, and day-laborers.

poverty as it engaged the elements in a struggle for the possession of the Piazza. But the snow continued to fall, and through the twilight of the descending flakes all this toil and encounter looked like that weary kind of effort in dreams, when the most determined industry seems only to renew the task. The lofty crest of the bell-tower was hidden in the folds of falling snow, and I could no longer see the golden angel upon its summit. But looked at across the Piazza, the beautiful outline of St. Mark's Church was perfectly pencilled in the air, and the shifting threads of the snow-fall were woven into a spell of novel enchantment around a structure that always seemed to me too exquisite in its fantastic loveliness to be anything but the creation of magic. The tender snow had compassionated the beautiful edifice for all the wrongs of time, and so hid the stains and ugliness of decay that it looked as if just from the hand of the builder, — or, better said, just from the brain of the architect. There was marvellous freshness in the colors of the mosaics in the great arches of the façade, and all that gracious harmony into which the temple rises, of marble scrolls and leafy exuberance airily

supporting the statues of the saints, was a hundred times etherealized by the purity and whiteness of the drifting flakes. The snow lay lightly on the golden globes that tremble like peacock-crests above the vast domes, and plumed them with softest white; it robed the saints in ermine, and it danced over all its work, as if exulting in its beauty —beauty which filled me with subtle, selfish yearning to keep such evanescent loveliness for the little-while-longer of my whole life, and with despair to think that even the poor lifeless shadow of it could never be fairly reflected in picture or poem.

Through the wavering snow-fall, the St. Theodore upon one of the granite pillars of the Piazzetta did not show so grim as his wont is, and the winged lion on the other might have been a winged lamb, so mild and gentle he looked by the tender light of the storm.[1] The towers of the island

[1] St. Theodore was the first patron of Venice, but he was deposed and St. Mark adopted, when the bones of the latter were brought from Alexandria. The Venetians seem to have felt some compunctions for this desertion of an early friend, and they have given St. Theodore a place on one of the granite pillars, while the other is surmounted by the Lion, representing St. Mark. *Fra Marco e Todaro* is a Venetian proverb expressing the state of perplexity which we indicate by the figure of an ass between two bundles of hay.

churches loomed faint and far away in the dimness; the sailors in the rigging of the ships that lay in the Basin wrought like phantoms among the shrouds; the gondolas stole in and out of the opaque distance more noiselessly and dreamily than ever; and a silence, almost palpable, lay upon the mutest city in the world.

IV

COMINCIA FAR CALDO

THE Place of St. Mark is the heart of Venice, and from this beats her life in every direction through an intricate system of streets and canals that bring it back again to the same centre. So, if the slightest uneasiness had attended the frequency with which I lost my way in the city at first, there would always have been this comfort: that the place was very small in actual extent, and that if I continued walking I must reach the Piazza sooner or later. There is a crowd constantly tending to and from it, and you have but to take this tide, and be drifted to St. Mark's, — or to the Rialto Bridge, whence it is directly accessible.

Of all the open spaces in the city, that before the church of St. Mark alone bears the name of Piazza, and the rest are called merely *campi*, or fields. But if the company of the noblest architecture can give honor, the Piazza San Marco merits its dis-

tinction, not in Venice only but in the whole world; for I fancy that no other place in the world is set in such goodly bounds. Its westward length is terminated by the Imperial Palace; its lateral borders are formed by lines of palace called the New Procuratie on the right, and the Old Procuratie on the left;[1] and the church of St. Mark fills up almost its whole width upon the east, leaving space enough, however, for a glimpse of the Gothic perfection of the Ducal Palace. The place then opens southward with the name of Piazzetta, between the eastern façade of the Ducal Palace and the classic front of the Libreria Vecchia, and expands and ends at last on the mole, where stand the pillars of St. Mark and St. Theodore; and then this mole, passing the southern façade of the Doge's Palace, stretches away to the Public Gardens at the eastern extremity of the city, over half a score of bridges, between lines of houses and shipping — stone and wooden walls — in the long, crescent-shaped quay called Riva degli Schiavoni. Looking northward up the Piazzetta from the Molo, the vision traverses the

[1] In Republican days the palaces of the *Procuratori di San Marco.*

eastern breadth of the Piazza, and rests upon the Clock Tower, gleaming with blue and gold, on which the bronze Giants beat the hours; or it climbs the great mass of the Campanile San Marco, standing apart from the church at the corner of the New Procuratie, and rising four hundred feet toward the sky, — the sky where the Venetian might well place his heaven, as the Moors bounded Paradise in the celestial expanse that roofed Granada.

My first lodging was but a step out of the Piazza, and this vicinity brought me early into familiar acquaintance with its beauty. But I never, during three years, passed through it in my daily walks without feeling as freshly as at first the greatness of this beauty. The church, which the mighty bell-tower and the lofty height of the palace-lines make to look low, is in no wise humbled by the contrast, but is like a queen enthroned amid upright reverence. The religious sentiment is deeply appealed to, I think, in the interior of St. Mark's; but if its interior is heaven's, its exterior, like a good man's daily life, is earth's; and it is this winning loveliness of earth that first attracts you to it, and when you emerge from its portals you enter

upon spaces of such sunny length and breadth, set round with such exquisite architecture, that it makes you glad to be living in this world. Before you expands the great Piazza, peopled with its various life; on your left, between the Pillars of the Piazzetta, swims the blue lagoon, and overhead climb the arches, one above another, in excesses of fantastic grace.

Whatever could please, the Venetian seems to have brought hither and made part of his Piazza, that it might remain forever the city's supreme grace; and so, though there are public gardens and several pleasant walks in the city, the great resort in summer and winter, by day and by night, is the Piazza San Marco. Its ground-level, under the Procuratie, is belted with a glittering line of shops and *caffè*, the most tasteful and brilliant in the world, and the arcades that pass round three of its sides are filled with loungers and shoppers, even when there is music by the Austrian bands; for, as we have seen, the purest patriot may then walk under the Procuratie, without stain to the principles which would be hopelessly blackened if he set foot in the Piazza. The absence of dust and noisy hoofs and wheels

tempts social life out-of-doors in Venice more than in any other Italian city, though the tendency to this sort of expansion is common throughout Italy. Beginning with the warm days of early May, and continuing till the *villeggiatura* (the period spent at the country-seat) interrupts it late in September, all Venice goes by a single impulse of *dolce far niente*, and sits gossiping at the doors of the innumerable *caffè* on the Riva degli Schiavoni, in the Piazza San Marco, and in the different squares in every part of the city. But, of course, the most brilliant scene of this kind is in St. Mark's Place, which has a night-time glory indescribable, won from the light of uncounted lamps upon its architectural groups. The superb Imperial Palace, the sculptured, arcaded, and pillared Procuratie, the Byzantine magic and splendor of the church, — will it all be there when you come again tomorrow night? The unfathomable heaven above seems part of the place, for I think it is never so tenderly blue over any other spot of earth. And when the sky is blurred with clouds, shall not the Piazza vanish with the azure? — People, I say, come to drink coffee, and eat ices here in the summer evenings,

and then, what with the promenades in the arcades and in the Piazza, the music, the sound of feet, and the hum of voices, unbroken by the ruder uproar of cities where there are horses and wheels — the effect is that of a large evening party, and in this aspect the Piazza is like a vast drawing-room.

I liked well to see that strange life, which even the stout, dead-in-earnest little Bohemian musicians, piping in the centre of the Piazza, could not altogether substantialize, and which constantly took immateriality from the loveliness of its environment. In the winter the scene was the most purely Venetian, and in my first winter, when I had abandoned all thought of churches till spring, I settled down to steady habits of idleness and coffee, and contemplated the life of the Piazza.

By all odds the loungers at Florian's were the most interesting, because they were the most various. People of all shades of politics met in the dainty little saloons, though there were shades of division even there, and they did not mingle. The Italians carefully assorted themselves in a room furnished with green velvet, and the Austrians and the Aus-

triacanti frequented a red-velvet room. They were curious to look at, those tranquil, indolent, Italian loafers, and I had an uncommon relish for them. They seldom spoke together, and when they did speak, they burst from silence into tumultuous controversy, and then lapsed again into perfect silence. The elder among them sat with their hands carefully folded on the heads of their sticks, gazing upon the ground, or else buried themselves in the perusal of the French journals. The younger stood a good deal about the doorways, and now and then passed a gentle, gentle jest with the elegant waiters in black coats and white cravats, who hurried to and fro with the orders, and called them out in strident tones to the accountant at his little table; or sometimes these young idlers made a journey to the room devoted to ladies and forbidden to smokers, looked long and deliberately in upon its loveliness, and then returned to the bosom of their taciturn companions. By chance I found them playing chess, but very rarely. They were all well-dressed, handsome men, with beards carefully cut, brilliant hats and boots, and conspicuously clean linen. I used to wonder who they were, to what order of society they

Florian's

belonged, and whether they, like my worthless self, had never anything else but lounging at Florian's to do; but I really know none of these things to this day. Some men in Venice spend their noble, useful lives in this way, and it was the proud reply of a Venetian father, when asked of what profession his son was, "*È in Piazza!*" That was, he bore a cane, wore light gloves, and stared from Florian's windows at the ladies who went by.

At the Caffè Quadri, immediately across the Piazza, there was a scene of equal hopefulness. But there, all was a glitter of uniforms, and the idling was carried on with a great noise of conversation in Austrian-German. Heaven knows what it was all about, but I presume the talk was upon topics of mutual improvement, calculated to advance the interests of self-government and mankind. These officers were very comely, intelligent-looking people, with the most good-natured faces. They came and went restlessly, sitting down and knocking their steel scabbards against the tables, or rising and straddling off with their long swords kicking against their legs. They are the most stylish soldiers in the world, and one has

no notion how ill they can dress when left to themselves, till one sees them in civil clothes.

Further up toward the Fabbrica Nuova (as the Imperial Palace is called), under the Procuratie Vecchie, is the Caffè Specchi, frequented only by young Italians, of an order less wealthy than those who go to Florian's. Across from this *caffè* is that of the Emperor of Austria, resorted to chiefly by non-commissioned officers, and civilian officials of lower grade. You know the latter, at a glance, by their beard, which in Venice is an index to every man's politics: no Austriacante wears the imperial, no Italianissimo shaves it. Next is the Caffè Suttil, rather Austrian, and frequented by Italian *codini*, or old fogies, in politics: gray old fellows, who caress their sticks with more constant zeal than even the elders at Florian's. Quite at the other end of the Procuratie Nuove is the Caffè of the Greeks, a nation which I have commonly seen represented there by two or three Albanians with an Albanian boy, who, being dressed exactly like his father, curiously impressed me, as if he were the young of some Oriental animal — say a boy-elephant, or infant camel.

I hope that the reader adds to this sketch, even in the winter time, occasional tourists under the Procuratie, at the *caffè*, and in the shops where the shop-keepers are devouring them with the keenness of an appetite unsated by the hordes of summer visitors. I hope that the reader also groups me fishermen, gondoliers, beggars, and loutish boys about the base of St. Mark's and at the feet of the three flag-staffs before the church; that he passes me a slatternly woman and a frowzy girl or two through the Piazza occasionally; and that he calls down the flocks of pigeons hovering near. I fancy the latter half ashamed to show themselves, as being aware that they are a great humbug, and unrightfully in the guide-books.

Meantime, while I sit at Florian's, sharing and studying the universal worthlessness about me, the brief winter passes, and the spring of the south — so unlike the ardent season of the north, where it burns full summer before the snows are dried upon the fields — descends upon the city and the sea. But except in the little gardens of the palaces, and where here and there a fig-tree lifts its head to peer over a lofty stone wall, the spring finds no response of swelling bud

and unfolding leaf, and it is human nature alone which welcomes it. Perhaps it is for this reason that the welcome is more visible in Venice than elsewhere, and that here, where the effect of the season is narrowed and limited to men's hearts, the joy it brings is all the keener and deeper. It is certain at least that the rapture is more demonstrative. The city, at all times voiceful, seems to burst into song with the advent of these golden days and silver nights. Bands of young men go singing through the moonlit streets, and the Grand Canal reëchoes the music of the parties of young girls as they drift along in the scarcely moving boats, and sing the glories of the lagoons and the loves of fishermen and gondoliers. In the Public Gardens they walk and sing; and wandering minstrels come forth before the *caffè*, and it is hard to get beyond the tinkling of guitars and the scraping of fiddles. It is as if the city had put off its winter humor with its winter dress; and as Venice in winter is the dreariest and gloomiest place in the world, so in spring it is the fullest of joy and light. There is a pleasant bustle in the streets, a ceaseless clatter of feet over the stones of the squares, and a constant movement of boats upon the canals.

We say, in a cheap and careless way, that the southern peoples have no *homes*. But this is true only in a restricted sense, for the Italian, and the Venetian especially, makes the whole city his home in pleasant weather. No one remains under a roof who can help it; and now, as I said before, the fascinating out-door life begins. All day long the people sit and drink coffee and eat ices, and gossip together before the *caffè*, and the soft midnight sees the same diligent idlers in their places. The promenade is at all seasons the favorite Italian amusement; it has its rigidly fixed hours, and its limits are also fixed: but now, in spring, even the promenade is a little lawless, and the crowds upon the Riva sometimes walk as far as the Public Gardens, and throng all the wider avenues and the Piazza; while young Venice comes to take the sun at St. Mark's in the arms of its high-breasted nurses, — mighty country-women, who, in their bright costumes, their dangling chains, and head-dresses of gold and silver baubles, stride through the Piazza with the high, free-stepping movement of blood-horses, and look like the women of some elder race of barbaric vigor and splendor, which, but for

them, had passed away from our puny, dull-clad times.

"È la stagion che ognuno s' innamora;"

and now young girls steal to their balconies, and linger there for hours, subtly conscious of the young men sauntering to and fro, and looking up at them from beneath. Now, in the shady little courts, the Venetian housewives, who must perforce remain indoors, put out their heads and gossip from window to window; while the pretty water-carriers, filling their buckets from the wells below, chatter and laugh at their work. Every street down which you look is likewise vocal with gossip; and if the picturesque projection of balconies, shutters, and chimneys, of which the vista is full, hide the heads of the gossipers, be sure there is a face looking out of every window for all that, and the social, expansive presence of the season is felt there.

The poor, whose sole luxury the summer is, lavish the spring upon themselves unsparingly. They come forth from their dark dens in crumbling palaces and damp basements, and live in the sunlight and the welcome air. They work, they eat, they sleep out of doors. Mothers of families sit about

their doors and spin, or walk volubly up and down with other slatternly matrons, armed with spindle and distaff; while their raven-haired daughters, lounging near the thrèsh-old, chase the covert insects that haunt the tangles of the children's locks. Within doors shines the bare bald head of the grandmother, who never ceases talking for an instant.

Before the winter passed, I had changed my habitation from rooms near the Piazza to quarters on the Campo San Bartolomeo, through which the busiest street in Venice passes, from St. Mark's to the Rialto Bridge. It is one of the smallest squares of the city, and the very noisiest, and here the spring came with intolerable uproar. I had taken my rooms early in March, when the tumult under my windows amounted only to a cheer-ful stir, and made company for me; but when the winter broke, and the windows were opened, I found that I had too much society.

Each campo in Venice is a little city, self-contained and independent. Each has its church, of which it was in the earliest times the burial-ground; and each within its limits compasses an apothecary's shop, a mercer's

and draper's shop, a blacksmith's and shoemaker's shop, a *caffè*, more or less brilliant, a green-grocer's and fruiterer's, a family grocery, — nay, there is also a second-hand merchant's shop where you buy and sell every kind of worn-out thing at the lowest rates. Of course there is a coppersmith's and a watchmaker's, and pretty certainly a wood-carver's and gilder's, while without a barber's shop no campo could preserve its integrity or inform itself of the social and political news of the day. In addition to all these elements of bustle and disturbance, San Bartolomeo swarmed with the traffic and rang with the bargains of the Rialto market.

Here the small dealer makes up in boastful clamor for the absence of quantity and assortment in his wares; and it often happens that an almost imperceptible boy, with a card of shirt-buttons and a paper of hairpins, is much worse than the Anvil Chorus with real anvils. Fishermen, with baskets of fish upon their heads; peddlers, with trays of housewife wares; louts who dragged baskets of lemons and oranges back and forth by long cords; men who sold water by the glass; charlatans who advertised cement

for mending broken dishes, and drops for the cure of toothache; jugglers who spread their carpets and arranged their temples of magic upon the ground; organists who ground their organs; and poets of the people who brought out new songs, and sang and sold them to the crowd; — these were the children of confusion, whom the pleasant sun and friendly air woke to frantic and interminable uproar in San Bartolomeo.

Yet there was a charm about all this at first, and I spent much time in the study of the vociferous life under my windows, trying to make out the meaning of the different cries, and to trace them back to their sources. There was one which puzzled me for a long time — a sharp, pealing cry that ended in a wail of angry despair, and, rising high above all other sounds, impressed the spirit like the cry of that bird in the tropic forests which the terrified Spaniards called the *alma perdida.* After many days of listening and trembling, I found that it proceeded from a wretched, sun-burnt girl, who carried about some dozens of knotty pears, and whose hair hung disheveled round her eyes, bloodshot with the strain of her incessant shrieks.

In San Bartolomeo, as in other squares,

the buildings are palaces above and shops below. The ground-floor is devoted to the small commerce of various kinds already mentioned; the first story above is occupied by tradesmen's families; and on the third or fourth floor is the *appartamento signorile.* From the balconies of these stories hung the cages of innumerable finches, canaries, blackbirds, and savage parrots, which sang and screamed with delight in the noise that rose from the crowd. All the human life, therefore, which the spring drew to the casements was perceptible only in dumb show. One of the palaces opposite was used as a hotel, and faces continually appeared at the windows. By all odds the most interesting figure there was that of a stout peasant serving-girl, dressed in a white knitted jacket, a crimson neckerchief, and a bright-colored gown, and wearing long dangling ear-rings of yellowest gold. For hours this idle maiden balanced herself half over the balcony-rail in perusal of the people under her, and I suspect made love at that distance, and in that constrained position, to some one in the crowd. On another balcony, a lady sat and knitted with crimson yarn; and at the window of still another house, a damsel now looked out upon

the square, and now gave a glance into the room, in the evident direction of a mirror. Venetian neighbors have the amiable custom of studying one another's features through opera-glasses; but I could not persuade myself to use this means of learning the mirror's response to the damsel's constant "Fair or not?" being a believer in every woman's right to look well a little way off. I shunned whatever trifling temptation there was in the case, and turned again to the campo beneath — to the placid dandies about the door of the *caffè*, to the tide of passers from the Merceria; the smooth-shaven Venetians of other days, and the bearded Venetians of these; the dark-eyed, white-faced Venetian girls, hooped in cruel disproportion to the narrow streets, but richly clad, and moving with southern grace; the files of heavily burdened soldiers; the little policemen loitering lazily about with their swords at their sides, and in their spotless Austrian uniforms.

As the spring advances in Venice, and the heat increases, the expansive delight with which the city hails its coming passes into a tranquiller humor, as if the joy of the beautiful season had sunk too deeply into the

city's heart for utterance. I, too, felt this longing for quiet, and as San Bartolomeo continued untouched by it, and all day roared and thundered under my windows, and all night long gave itself up to sleepless youths who there melodiously bayed the moon in chorus, I was obliged to abandon San Bartolomeo, and seek calmer quarters, where I might enjoy the last luxurious sensations of the spring-time in peace.

Now, with the city's lapse into this tranquiller humor, the promenades cease. The *facchino* gives all his leisure to sleeping in the sun; and in the mellow afternoons there is scarcely a space of six feet square on the Riva degli Schiavoni which does not bear its brown-cloaked peasant basking face-downward in the warmth. The broad steps of the bridges are by right the berths of the beggars; the sailors and fishermen slumber in their boats; and the gondoliers, if they do not sleep, are yet placated by the season, and forbear to quarrel, and only break into brief clamors at the sight of inaccessible Inglesi passing near them under the guard of *valets de place*. Even the play of the children ceases, except in the Public Gardens, where the children of the poor have

indolent games, and sport as noiselessly as the lizards that slide from shadow to shadow and glitter in the sun asleep. This vernal silence of the city possesses you, — the stranger in it, — not with sadness, not with melancholy, but with a deep sense of the sweetness of doing nothing, and an indifference to all purposes and chances. If ever you cared to have your name on men's tongues, behold! that old yearning for applause is dead. Praise would strike like pain through this delicious calm. And blame? It is a wild and frantic thing to dare it by any effort. Repose takes you to her inmost heart, and you learn her secrets — arcana unintelligible to you in the new-world life of bustle and struggle. Old lines of lazy rhyme win new color and meaning. The mystical, indolent poems whose music once charmed away all will to understand them are revealed now without your motion. Now, at last, you know *why*

"It was an Abyssinian maid"

who played upon the dulcimer. And Xanadu? It is the land in which you were born!

The slumbrous bells murmur to each other in the lagoons; the white sail faints into the

white distance; the gondola slides athwart the sheeted silver of the bay; the blind beggar, who seemed sleepless as fate, dozes at his post.

V

OPERA AND THEATRES

WITH the winter came to an end the amusement which, in spite of the existing political demonstration, I had drawn from the theatres. The Fenice, the great theatre of the city, being the property of private persons, has not been opened since the discontents of the Venetians were intensified in 1859; and it will not be opened, they say, till Victor Emanuel comes to honor the ceremony. Though not large, and certainly not so magnificent as the Venetians think, the Fenice is a superb and tasteful theatre. The best opera was formerly given in it, and now that it is closed the musical drama, of course, suffers. The Italians seldom go to it, and as there is not a sufficient number of foreign residents to support it in good style the opera commonly conforms to the character of the theatre San Benedetto, in which it is given, and is second-rate. It is nearly always subsidized by the city to the amount

of several thousand florins; but nobody need fall into the error, on this account, of supposing that it is cheap to the opera-goer, as it is in the little German cities. A box does not cost a great deal; but as the theatre is carried on in Italy by two different managements, — one of which receives the money for the boxes and seats, and the other the fee of admission to the theatre, — there is always the demand of the latter to be satisfied with nearly the same outlay as that for the box, before you can reach your place. The pit is fitted up with seats, of course, but you do not sit down there without paying. So, most Italians (who if they go at all go without ladies) and the poorer sort of government officials stand; the orchestra seats are reserved for the officers of the garrison. The first row of boxes, which is on a level with the heads of people in the pit, is well enough, but rank and fashion take a loftier flight, and sit in the second tier.

You look about in vain, however, for that old life of the theatre which once formed so great a part of Venetian gayety, — the visits from box to box, the gossiping between the acts, and the half-occult flirtations. The people in the boxes are few, the dressing not

splendid, and the beauty is the blonde, unfrequent beauty of the German aliens. Last winter being the fourth season the Italians had defied the temptation of the opera, some of the Venetian ladies yielded to it, but went plainly dressed, and sat far back in boxes of the third tier, and when they issued forth after the opera were veiled beyond recognition. The audience usually takes its enjoyment quietly; hissing now and then for silence in the house, and clapping hands for applause, without calling *bravo*, — an Italian custom which I have noted to be chiefly habitual with foreigners: with Germans, for instance, who spell it with a *p* and *f*.

I fancy that to find good Italian opera you must seek it somewhere out of Italy, — at London, or Paris, or New York, — though possibly it might be chanced upon at La Scala in Milan, or San Carlo in Naples. The cause of the decay of the musical art in Venice must be looked for among the events which seem to have doomed her to decay in everything; certainly it cannot be discerned in any indifference of the people to music. The *dimostrazione* keeps the better class of citizens from the opera, but the passion for it still exists in every order;

and God's gift of beautiful voice cannot be smothered in the race by any Situation. You hear the airs of opera sung as commonly upon the streets in Venice as our own colored melodies at home; and the street-boy when he sings has an inborn sense of music and a power of execution which put to shame the cultivated tenuity of sound that issues from the northern mouth, —

"That frozen, passive, palsied breathing-hole."

In the days of the Fenice there was a school for the ballet at that theatre, but this last and least worthy part of dramatic art is now an imported element of the opera in Venice. No novices appear on her stages, and the musical conservatories of the place, which were once so famous, have long ceased to exist. The musical theatre was very popular in Venice as early as the middle of the seventeenth century; and the care of the state for the drama existed from the first. The government, which always piously forbade the representation of Mysteries, and, as the theatre advanced, even prohibited plays containing characters of the Old or New Testament, began about the close of the century to protect and encourage the instruction of music in the different foundling

hospitals and public refuges in the city. The young girls in these institutions were taught to play on instruments, and to sing, — at first for the alleviation of their own dull and solitary life, and afterward for the delight of the public. In the merry days that passed just before the fall of the Republic, the Latin oratorios which they performed in the churches attached to the hospitals were among the most fashionable diversions in Venice. The singers were instructed by the best masters of the time; and at the close of the last century the conservatories of the Incurables, the Foundlings, and the Mendicants were famous throughout Europe for their dramatic concerts, and for those pupils who found the transition from sacred to profane opera natural and easy.

With increasing knowledge of the language, I learned to enjoy best the unmusical theatre, and went oftener to the comedy than the opera. It is hardly by any chance that the Italians play ill, and I have seen excellent acting at the Venetian theatres, both in the modern Italian comedy, which is very rich and good, and in the elder plays of Goldoni, — compositions deliciously racy when seen in Venice, where alone their admirable

fidelity of drawing and coloring can be perfectly appreciated. The best comedy is usually given to the educated classes at the pretty Teatro Apollo, while a bloodier and louder drama is offered to the populace at Teatro Malibran, where on a Sunday night you may see the plebeian life of the city in one of its most entertaining and characteristic phases. The sparings of the whole week which have not been laid out for chances in the lottery are spent for this evening's amusement; and in the vast pit you see, besides the families of comfortable artisans who can evidently afford it, a multitude of the ragged poor, whose presence, even at the low rate of eight or ten soldi [1] apiece, it is hard to account for. It is very peremptory, this audience, in its likes and dislikes, and applauds and hisses with great vehemence. It likes best the sanguinary local spectacular drama; it cheers and cheers again every allusion to Venice; and when the curtain rises on some well-known Venetian scene, it has out the scene-painter by name three times, — which is all the police permits. The auditors wear their hats in the

[1] The soldo is the hundredth part of the Austrian florin, which is worth about forty-nine cents of American money.

pit, but deny that privilege to the people in the boxes, and raise stormy and wrathful cries of *cappello!* till these uncover. Between acts they indulge in excesses of water flavored with anise, and even go to the extent of candied nuts and fruits; which are hawked about the theatre, and sold for two soldi the stick, — with the tooth-pick on which they are spitted thrown into the bargain.

The Malibran Theatre is well attended on Sunday night, but the one entertainment which never fails of drawing and delighting full houses is the theatre of the puppets or the Marionette, and thither I like best to go. The Marionette prevail with me, for I find in the performances of these puppets no new condition demanded of the spectator, but rather a frank admission of unreality that makes every shadow of verisimilitude delightful, and gives a marvellous relish to the immemorial effects and traditionary tricks of the stage.

The little theatre of the puppets is at the corner of a narrow street opening from the Calle del Ridotto, and is of the tiniest dimensions and simplest appointments. There are no boxes, — the whole theatre is scarcely

larger than a stage-box, — and you pay ten soldi to go into the pit, where you are much more comfortable than the aristocrats who have paid fifteen for places in the dress-circle above. The stage is very small, and the scenery a kind of coarse miniature painting. But it is very complete, and everything is contrived to give relief to the puppets and to produce an illusion of magnitude in their figures. They are very artlessly introduced, and are manœuvred, according to the exigencies of the scene, by means of cords running from their heads, arms, and legs to the top of the stage. To the management of the cords they owe all the vehemence of their passions and the grace of their oratory, not to mention a certain gliding, ungradual locomotion, altogether spectral.

The drama of the Marionette is of a more elevated and ambitious tone than that of the Burattini, which exhibit their vulgar loves and coarse assassinations in little punch-shows on the Riva and in the larger squares; but the standard characters are nearly the same with both, and are all descended from the *commedia a braccio*[1] which flourished

[1] Comedy by the yard.

on the Italian stage before the time of Goldoni. And I am very far from disparaging the Burattini, which have great and peculiar merits, not the least of which is the art of drawing the most delighted, dirty, and picturesque audiences. Like most of the Marionette, they converse vicariously in the Venetian dialect, and have such a rapidity of utterance that it is difficult to follow them. I only remember to have made out one of their comedies, — a play in which an ingenious lover procured his rich and successful rival to be arrested for lunacy, and married the disputed young person while the other was raging in the mad-house. This play is performed to enthusiastic audiences; but for the most part the favorite drama of the Burattini appears to be a sardonic farce, in which the chief character — a puppet ten inches high, with a fixed and staring expression of Mephistophelean good-nature and wickedness — deludes other and weak-minded puppets into trusting him, and then beats them with a club upon the back of the head until they die. The murders of this infamous creature, which are always executed in a spirit of jocose *sang-froid*, and accompanied by humorous remarks, are

received with the keenest relish by the spectators; and, indeed, the action is every way worthy of applause. The dramatic spirit of the Italian race seems to communicate itself to the puppets, and they perform their parts with a fidelity to theatrical unnaturalness which is wonderful. I have witnessed death agonies on the little stages which the great American tragedian himself (whoever he may happen to be) could not surpass in degree of energy. And then the Burattini deserve the greater credit because they are agitated by the legs from below the scene, and not managed by cords from above, as at the Marionette Theatre. Their audiences, as I said, are always interesting, and comprise: first, boys ragged and dirty in inverse ratio to their size; then, weak little girls, supporting immense weight of babies; then, Austrian soldiers, with long coats and short pipes; lumbering Dalmat sailors; a transient Greek or Turk; Venetian loafers, pale-faced, statuesque, with the drapery of their cloaks thrown over their shoulders; young women, with bare heads of thick black hair; old women, all fluff and fangs; wooden-shod peasants, with hooded cloaks of coarse brown; then, boys — and boys.

They all enjoy the spectacle with approval, and take the drama *au grand sérieux*, uttering none of the gibes which sometimes attend efforts to please in our own country. Even when the hat, or other instrument of extortion, is passed round, and they give nothing, and when the manager, in an excess of fury and disappointment, calls out, "Ah! sons of dogs! I play no more to you!" and closes the theatre, they quietly and unresentfully disperse. Though, indeed, *fioi de cani* means no great reproach in Venetian parlance; and parents of the lower classes caressingly address their children in these terms. Whereas to call one Figure of a Pig is to wreak upon him the deadliest insult which can be put into words.

In the *commedia a braccio*, before mentioned as the inheritance of the Marionette, the dramatist furnished merely the plot and the outline of the action; the players filled in the character and dialogue. With any people less quick-witted than the Italians this sort of comedy must have been insufferable, but it formed the delight of that people till the middle of the last century, and even after Goldoni went to Paris he furnished his Italian players with the *commedia*

a braccio. I have heard some very passable *gags* at the Marionette, but the real *commedia a braccio* no longer exists, and its familiar and invariable characters perform written plays.

Facanapa is a modern addition to the old stock of *dramatis personæ*, and he is now without doubt the popular favorite in Venice. He is always, like Pantalon, a Venetian; but whereas the latter is always a merchant, Facanapa is anything that the exigency of the play demands. He is a dwarf, even among puppets, and his dress invariably consists of black knee-breeches and white stockings, a very long, full-skirted black coat, and a three-cornered hat. His individual traits are displayed in all his characters, and he is ever a coward, a boaster, and a liar; a glutton and avaricious, but withal of an agreeable *bonhomie* that wins the heart. To tell the truth, I care little for the plays in which he has no part, and I have learned to think a certain trick of his — lifting his leg rigidly to a horizontal line, by way of emphasis, and saying, "Capisse la?" or "Sa la?" (You understand? You know?) — one of the finest things in the world.

In nearly all of Goldoni's Venetian comedies, and in many which he wrote in Italian, appear the standard associates of Facanapa, — Arlecchino, il Dottore, Pantalon dei Bisognosi, and Brighella. The reader is at first puzzled by their constant recurrence, but never weary of Goldoni's witty management of them. They are the chief persons of the obsolete *commedia a braccio*, and have their nationality and peculiarities marked by immemorial attribution. Pantalon is a Venetian merchant, rich, and commonly the indulgent father of a wilful daughter or dissolute son, figuring also sometimes as the childless uncle of large fortune. The second old man is il Dottore, who is a Bolognese, and a doctor of the University. Brighella and Arlecchino are both of Bergamo. The one is a sharp and roguish servant, busybody, and rascal; the other is dull and foolish, and always masked and dressed in motley, — a gibe at the poverty of the Bergamasks, among whom, moreover, the extremes of stupidity and cunning are most usually found, according to the popular notion in Italy.

The plays of the Marionette are written expressly for them, and are much shorter

than the standard drama as it is known to us. They embrace, however, a wide range of subjects, from lofty melodrama to broad farce, as you may see by looking at the advertisements in the Venetian gazettes for any week past, where perhaps you shall find the plays performed to have been: The Ninety-nine Misfortunes of Facanapa; Arlecchino, the Sleeping King; Facanapa as Soldier in Catalonia; the Capture of Smyrna, with Facanapa and Arlecchino Slaves in Smyrna (this play being repeated several nights); and Arlecchino and Facanapa Hunting an Ass. If you can fancy people going night after night to this puppet-drama, and enjoying it with the keenest appetite, you will not only do something toward realizing to yourself the easily pleased Italian nature, but you will also suppose great excellence in the theatrical management. For my own part, I find few things in life equal to the Marionette. I am never tired of their bewitching absurdity, their inevitable defects, their irresistible touches of verisimilitude. At their theatre I have seen the relenting parent (Pantalon) twitchingly embrace his erring son, while Arlecchino, as the large-hearted cobbler who has paid the house-rent of the

erring son when the prodigal was about to be cast into the street, looked on and rubbed his hands with amiable satisfaction and the conventional delight in benefaction which we all know. I have witnessed the base terrors of Facanapa at an apparition, and I have beheld the keen spiritual agonies of the Emperor Nicholas on hearing of the fall of Sebastopol. Not many passages of real life have affected me as deeply as the atrocious behavior of the brutal baronial brother-in-law, when he responds to the expostulations of his friend the Knight of Malta, — a puppet of shaky and vacillating presence, but a soul of steel and rock: —

"Why, O baron, detain this unhappy lady in thy dungeons? Remember, she is thy brother's wife. Remember thine own honor. Think on the sacred name of virtue." (Wrigglingly, and with a set countenance and gesticulations toward the pit.)

To which the ferocious baron makes answer, with a sneering laugh, "Honor? — I know it not? Virtue? — I detest it!" and attempting to pass the knight, in order to inflict fresh indignities upon his sister-in-law, he yields to the natural infirmities of rags and pasteboard, and topples against him.

Facanapa, also, in his great scene of the Haunted Poet, is tremendous. You discover him in bed, too much visited by the Muse to sleep, and reading his manuscripts aloud to himself, after the manner of poets when they cannot find other listeners. He is alarmed by various ghostly noises in the house, and is often obliged to get up and examine the dark corners of the room, and to look under the bed. When at last the spectral head appears at the foot-board, Facanapa vanishes with a miserable cry under the bed-clothes, and the scene closes. Intrinsically the scene is not much, but this great actor throws into it a life, a spirit, a drollery, wholly irresistible.

The ballet at the Marionette is a triumph of choreographic art, and is extremely funny. The *prima ballerina* has all the difficult grace and far-fetched arts of the *prima ballerina* of flesh and blood; and when the enthusiastic audience calls her back after the scene, she is humanly delighted, and acknowledges the compliment with lifelike *empressement.* I have no doubt the *corps de ballet* have their private jealousies and bickerings, when quietly laid away in boxes, and deprived of all positive power by the re-

moval of the cords which agitate their arms and legs. The puppets are great in *pirouette* and *pas seul;* but I think the strictly dramatic part of such spectacular ballets, as The Fall of Carthage, is their strong point.

The people who witness their performances are of all ages and conditions, — I remember to have once seen a Russian princess and some German countesses in the pit, — but the greater number of spectators are young men of the middle classes, pretty shop-girls, and artisans and their wives and children. The little theatre is a kind of trysting-place for lovers in humble life, and there is a great deal of amusing drama going on between the acts, in which the invariable Beppo and Nina of the Venetian populace take the place of the invariable Arlecchino and Facanapa of the stage. I one day discovered a letter at the bottom of the Canal of the Giudecca, to which watery resting-place some recreant, addressed as "Caro Antonio," had consigned it; and from this letter I came to know certainly of at least one love affair at the Marionette. "Caro Antonio" was humbly besought, "if his heart still felt the force of love," to meet the writer (who softly reproached him with neg-

lect) at the Marionette the night of date, at six o'clock; and I would not like to believe he could resist so tender a prayer, though perhaps it fell out so. I fished up through the lucent water this despairing little epistle, — it was full of womanly sweetness and bad spelling, — and dried away its briny tears on the blade of my oar. If ever I thought to keep it, with some vague purpose of offering it to any particularly anxious-looking Nina at the Marionette as to the probable writer, its unaccountable loss spared me the delicate office. Still, however, when I go to see the puppets, it is with an interest divided between the drolleries of Facanapa and the sad presence of expectation somewhere among the groups of dark-eyed girls there, who wear such immense hoops under such greasy dresses, who part their hair at one side, and call each other "Ciò!" Where art thou, O fickle and cruel, yet ever dear Antonio? All unconscious, I think, — gallantly posed against the wall, thy slouch hat brought forward to the point of thy long cigar, the arms of thy velvet jacket folded on thy breast, and thy ear-rings softly twinkling in the light.

VI

VENETIAN DINNERS AND DINERS

THEN I first came to Venice, I accepted the fate appointed to young men on the Continent. I took lodgings, and I began dining drearily at the restaurants. Worse prandial fortunes may befall one, but it is hard to conceive of the continuance of so great unhappiness elsewhere; while the restaurant life is an established and permanent thing in Italy, for every bachelor and for many forlorn families. It is not because the restaurants are very dirty, — if you wipe your plate and glass carefully before using them, they need not stomach you; it is not because the rooms are cold, — if you sit near the great vase of smouldering embers in the centre of each room, you may suffocate in comparative comfort; it is not because the prices are great, — they are really very reasonable; it is not for any very tangible fault that I object to life at the restaurants, and yet I cannot think of its hopeless homeless-

ness without rebellion against the whole system it implies, as something unnatural and insufferable.

But before we come to look closely at this aspect of Italian civilization, it is better to look first at a very noticeable trait of Italian character, — temperance in eating and drinking. As to the poorer classes, one observes without great surprise how slenderly they fare, and how, with a great habit of talking of meat and drink, the verb *mangiare* remains in fact for the most part inactive with them. But it is only just to say that this virtue of abstinence seems to be not wholly the result of necessity, for it prevails with other classes which could well afford the opposite vice. Meat and drink do not form the substance of conviviality with Venetians, as with the Germans and the English, and in degree with ourselves; and I have often noticed on the Mondays-at-the-Gardens, and other social festivals of the people, how the crowd amused itself with anything, — music, dancing, walking, talking, — anything but the great northern pastime of gluttony. Knowing the life of the place, I make quite sure that Venetian gayety is on few occasions connected with repletion; and I am ashamed

to confess that I have not always been able to repress a feeling of stupid scorn for the empty stomachs everywhere, which do not even ask to be filled, or, at least, do not insist upon it. The truth is, the North has a gloomy pride in gastronomic excess, which unfits her children to appreciate the cheerful prudence of the South.

Venetians eat but one meal a day, which is dinner. They breakfast on a piece of bread with coffee and milk; supper is a little cup of black coffee, or an ice, taken at a *caffè*. The coffee, however, is repeated frequently throughout the day; and in the summer-time fruit is eaten, but eaten sparingly, like everything else. As to the nature of the dinner, it of course varies somewhat according to the nature of the diner; but in most families of the middle class a dinner at home consists of a piece of boiled beef, a *minestra* (a soup thickened with vegetables, tripe, and rice), a vegetable dish of some kind, and the wine of the country. The failings of the repast among all classes lean to the side of simplicity, and the abstemious character of the Venetian finds sufficient comment in his familiar invitation to dinner: "*Venga a mangiar quattro risi con me.*" (Come eat four grains of rice with me.)

But invitations to dinner have never formed a prime element of hospitality in Venice. Goldoni notices this fact in his memoirs, and, speaking of the city in the early half of the last century, he says that the number and excellence of the eating-houses in the city made invitations to dinner at private houses rare, and superfluous among the courtesies offered to strangers.

The Venetian does not, like the Spaniard, place his house at your disposition, and, having extended this splendid invitation, consider the duties of hospitality fulfilled; he does not appear to think you want to make use of his house for social purposes, preferring himself the *caffè*, and finding home and comfort there, rather than under his own roof. "What *caffè* do you frequent? Ah! so do I. We shall meet often there." This is frequently your new acquaintance's promise of friendship. And one may even learn to like the social footing on which people meet at the *caffè*, as well as that of the parlor or drawing-room. I could not help thinking one evening at Padua, while we sat talking with some pleasant Paduans in one of the magnificent saloons of the *caffè* Pedrocchi, that I should

like to go there for society, if I could always find it there, much better than to private houses. There is far greater ease and freedom, more elegance and luxury, and not the slightest weight of obligation laid upon you for the gratification your friend's company has given you. One has not to be a debtor in the sum of a friend's outlay for house, servants, refreshments, and the like. Nowhere in Europe is the senseless and wasteful American custom of *treating* known; and nothing could be more especially foreign to the frugal instincts and habits of the Italians. So, when a party of friends at a *caffè* eat or drink, each one pays for what he takes, and pecuniarily the enjoyment of the evening is uncostly or not, according as each prefers. Of course no one sits down in such a place without calling for something; but I have frequently seen people respond to this demand of custom by ordering a glass of water with anise, at the expense of two soldi. A cup of black coffee, for five soldi, secures a chair, a table, and as many journals as you like, for as long time as you like.

I say, a stranger may learn to like the life of the *caffè*, — that of the restaurant

never; though the habit of frequenting the restaurants, to which Goldoni somewhat vaingloriously refers, seems to have grown upon the Venetians with the lapse of time. The eating-houses are almost without number, and are of every degree, from the shop of the sausage-maker, who supplies gondoliers and *facchini* with bowls of *sguassetto*, to the Caffè Florian. They all have names which are not strange to European ears, but which are sufficiently amusing to people who come from a land where nearly every public thing is named from some inspiration of patriotism or local pride. In Venice the principal restaurants are called The Steamboat, The Savage, The Little Horse, The Black Hat, and The Pictures; and I do not know that any one of them is more uncomfortable, uncleanly, or noisy than another, or that any one of them suffers from the fact that all are bad.

You do not get breakfast at the restaurant for the reason, before stated, of the breakfast's unsubstantiality. The dining commences about three o'clock in the afternoon, and continues till nine o'clock, most people dining at five or six. As a rule the attendance is insufficient, and no guest is

served until he has made a savage clapping on the tables, or clinking on his glass or plate. Then a hard-pushed waiter appears, and calls out, dramatically, "Behold me!" takes the order, shrieks it to the cook, and, returning with the dinner, cries out again, more dramatically than ever, "Behold it ready!" and arrays it with a great flourish on the table. I have dined in an hotel at Niagara, to the music of a brass band; but I did not find that so utterly bewildering, so destructive of the individual savor of the dishes, and so conducive to absent-minded gluttony as I at first found the constant rush and clamor of the waiters in the Venetian restaurants. The guests are, for the most part, patient and quiet enough, eating their *minestra* and boiled beef in such peace as the surrounding uproar permits them, and seldom making acquaintance with each other. It is a mistake, I think, to expect much talk from any people at dinner. The ingenious English tourists who visit the United States from time to time find us silent over our meat, and I have noticed the like trait among people of divers races in Europe.

As I have said, the greater part of the

diners at the restaurants are single, and seem to have no knowledge of each other. Perhaps the gill of the fiendish wine of the country, which they drink at their meals, is rather calculated to chill than warm the heart. But, in any case, a drearier set of my fellow-beings I have never seen, — no, not at evening parties, — and I conceive that their life in lodgings, at the *caffè* and the restaurant, remote from the society of women and all the higher privileges of fellowship for which men herd together, is at once the most gross and insipid, the most selfish and comfortless, life in the world. Our boarding-house life in America, dull, stupid, and flat as it often is, seems to me infinitely better than the restaurant life of young Italy. It is creditable to Latin Europe that, with all this homelessness and domestic outlawry, its young men still preserve the gentleness of civilization.

The families that share the exile of the eating-houses sometimes make together a feeble buzz of conversation, but the unfriendly spirit of the place seems soon to silence them. Undoubtedly they frequent the restaurant for economy's sake. Fuel is costly, and the restaurant is cheap, and its

cooking better than they could perhaps otherwise afford to have. Indeed, so cheap is the restaurant that actual experience proved the cost of a dinner there to be little more than the cost of the raw material in the market. From this inexpensiveness comes also the custom, which is common, of sending home to purchasers meals from the eating-houses.

As one descends in the scale of the restaurants, the difference is not so noticeable in the prices of the same dishes as in the substitution of cheaper varieties of food. At the best eating-houses, the Gallic traditions bear sway more or less, but in the poorer sort the cooking is done entirely by native artists, deriving their inspirations from the unsophisticated tastes of exclusively native diners. It is perhaps needless to say that they grow characteristic and picturesque as they grow dirty and cheap, until at last the cook-shop perfects the descent with a triumph of raciness and local coloring. The cook-shop in Venice opens upon you at almost every turn, — everywhere, in fact, but in the Piazza and the Merceria, — and looking in, you see its vast heaps of frying fish, and its huge caldrons of ever-boiling broth

which smell to heaven with garlic and onions. In the seducing windows smoke golden mountains of *polenta* (a thicker kind of mush or hasty-pudding, made of Indian meal, and universally eaten in North Italy), platters of crisp minnows, bowls of rice, roast poultry, dishes of snails and liver; and around the fascinating walls hang huge plates of bronzed earthenware for a lavish and a hospitable show, and for the representation of those scenes of Venetian story which are modelled upon them in bas-relief. Here I like to take my unknown friend — my scoundrel *facchino* or rascal gondolier — as he comes to buy his dinner, and bargains eloquently with the cook, who stands with a huge ladle in his hand capable of skimming mysterious things from vasty depths. I am spellbound by the drama which ensues, and in which all the cords of the human heart are touched, from those that tremble at high tragedy to those that are shaken by broad farce. When the diner has bought his dinner, and issues forth with his *polenta* in one hand, and his fried minnows or stewed snails in the other, my fancy fondly follows him to his gondola-station, where he eats it, and quarrels volubly with other gondoliers across the Grand Canal.

A simpler and less ambitious sort of cook-shop abounds in the region of Rialto, where on market mornings I have seen it driving a prodigious business with peasants, gondoliers, and laborers. Its more limited resources consist chiefly of fried eels, fish, *polenta*, and *sguassetto*. The latter is a true *roba veneziana*, and is a loud-flavored broth, made of those desperate scraps of meat which are found impracticable even by the sausage-makers. Another, but more delicate dish, peculiar to the place, is the clotted blood of poultry, fried in slices with onions. A great number of the families of the poor breakfast at these shops very abundantly, for three soldi each person.

In Venice every holiday has its appropriate viand. During carnival all the butter and cheese shop-windows are whitened with the snow of beaten cream, — *panamontata*. At San Martino the bakers parade troops of gingerbread warriors. Later, for Christmas, comes *mandorlato*, which is a candy made of honey and enriched with almonds. In its season only can any of these devotional delicacies be had; but there is a species of cruller, fried in oil, which has all seasons for its own. On the occasion of every *festa*

and of every *sagra* (which is the holiday of one parish only), stalls are erected in the squares for the cooking and sale of these crullers, between which and the religious sentiment proper to the whole year there seems to be some occult relation.

In the winter, the whole city appears to abandon herself to cooking for the public, till she threatens to hopelessly disorder the law of demand and supply. There are, to begin with, the *caffè* and restaurants of every class. Then there are the cook-shops, and the poulterers', and the sausage-makers'. Then, also, every fruit-stall is misty and odorous with roast apples, boiled beans, cabbage, and potatoes. The chestnut-roasters infest every corner, and men, women, and children cry roast pumpkin at every turn, till at last hunger seems an absurd and foolish vice, and the ubiquitous beggars, no less than the habitual abstemiousness of every class of the population, become the most perplexing and maddening of anomalies.

VII

HOUSEKEEPING IN VENICE

I HOPE that it is by a not unnatural progress I pass from speaking of dinners and diners to the kindred subject of the present chapter, and I trust the reader will not disdain the lowly-minded muse that sings this mild domestic lay. I was resolved in writing this book to tell what I had found most books of travel very slow to tell, — as much as possible of the every-day life of a people whose habits are so different from our own; endeavoring to develop a just notion of their character, not only from the show-traits which strangers are most likely to see, but also from experience of such things as strangers are most likely to miss.

The absolute want of society of my own nation in Venice would have thrown me upon study of the people for my amusement, even if I had cared to learn nothing of them; and the necessity of economical housekeeping would have caused me to live in the

frugal Venetian fashion, even if I had been disposed to remain a foreigner in everything. Of bachelor lodgings I had sufficient experience during my first year; but as most prudent travellers who visit the city for a week take lodgings, I need not describe my own particularly. You can tell the houses in which there are rooms to let by the squares of white paper fastened to the window-shutters; and a casual glance as you pass through the streets gives you the idea that the chief income of the place is derived from letting lodgings. Carpetless, dreary barracks the rooms usually are, with an uncompromising squareness of prints upon the wall, an appalling breadth of husk-bed, a niggardness of wash-bowl, and an obduracy of sofa never, never to be dissociated in their victim's mind from the idea of the villainous hard bread of Venice on which the gloomy landlady sustains her life with its immutable purposes of plunder. Flabbiness without softness is the tone of these discouraging chambers, which are dear or not according to the season and the situation. On the sunlit Riva during winter, and on the Grand Canal in summer, they are costly enough, but they are to be found on nearly all the

squares at reasonable rates. On the narrow streets, where most native bachelors have them, they are absurdly cheap.

As in nearly all places on the Continent, a house in Venice means a number of rooms, including a whole story in a building, or part of it only, but always completely separated from the story above and below, or from the other rooms on the same floor. Every house has its own entrance from the street, or by a common hall and stairway from the ground-floor, where are the cellars or store-rooms, while each kitchen is usually on a level with the other rooms of the house to which it belongs. The isolation of the different families is secured (as perfectly as where a building is solely appropriated to each) either by the exclusive possession of a street-door,[1] or by the unsocial domestic hab-

[1] Where the street entrance is in common, every floor has its bell, which, being sounded, summons a servant to some upper window, with the demand, most formidable to strangers, "*Chi xe?*" (Who is it?) But you do not answer with your name. You reply, "*Amici!*" (Friends!) on which comforting reassurance the servant draws the latch of the door by a wire running upward to her hand, and permits you to enter and wander about at your leisure till you reach her secret height. This is, supposing the master or mistress of the house to be at home. If they are not in, she answers your "*Amici!*" with "*No ghe ne xe!*" (Nobody here!) and lets down a basket by a string outside the window, and fishes up your card.

its of Europe. You bow and give good-day to the people whom you meet in the common hall and on the common stairway, but you rarely know more of them than their names, and you certainly care nothing about them. The sociability of Europe, and more especially of Southern Europe, is shown abroad; under the domestic roof it dwindles and disappears. And indeed it is no wonder, considering how dispiriting and comfortless most of the houses are. The lower windows are heavily barred with iron; the wood-work is rude, even in many palaces in Venice; the rest is stone and stucco; the walls are not often papered, though they are sometimes painted: the most pleasing and inviting feature of the interior is the frescoed ceiling of the better rooms. The windows shut imperfectly, the heavy wooden blinds imperviously (is it worth while to observe that there are no Venetian blinds in Venice?); the doors lift slantingly from the floor, in which their lower hinges are imbedded; the stoves are of plaster, and consume fuel without just return of heat; the balconies alone are always charming, whether they hang high over the streets or look out upon the canals, and, with the gayly painted ceilings, go far to make the houses habitable.

A Street Door

It happens in the case of houses, as with nearly everything else in Italy, that you pay about the same price for half the comfort that you get in America. In Venice, most of the desirable situations are on the Grand Canal; but here the rents are something absurdly high when taken in consideration with the fact that the city is not made a place of residence by foreigners, like Florence, and that it has no commercial activity to enhance the cost of living. House-hunting, under these circumstances, becomes an office of constant surprise and disconcertment to the stranger. You look, for example, at a suite of rooms in a tumble-down old palace, where the walls, shamelessly smarted up with coarse paper, crumble at your touch; where the floor rises and falls like the sea, and the door-frames and window-cases have long lost all recollection of the plumb. Madama la Baronessa is at present occupying these pleasant apartments, and you only gain admission to them after an embassy to procure her permission. Madama la Baronessa receives you courteously, and you pass through her rooms, which are a little in disorder, the Baronessa being on the point of removal. Madama la Baronessa's hoop-skirts prevail

upon the floors; and at the side of the couch which her form lately pressed in slumber you observe a French novel and a wasted candle in the society of a half-bottle of the wine of the country. A bedroomy smell pervades the whole suite, and through the open window comes a curious stench, explained as the odor of Madama la Baronessa's guinea-pigs, of which she is so fond that she has had their sty placed immediately under her window in the garden. It is this garden which has first taken your heart, with a glimpse caught through the great open door of the palace. It is disordered and wild, but so much the better; its firs are very thick and dark, and there are certain statues, fauns and nymphs, which weather-stains and mosses have made much decenter than the sculptor intended. You think that for this garden's sake you could put up with the house, which must be very cheap. What is the price of the rooms? you ask of the smiling landlord. He answers, without winking, "If taken for several years, a thousand florins a year." At which you suppress the whistle of disdainful surprise, and say you think it will not suit. He calls your attention to the sun, which

comes in at every side, which will roast you in summer, and will not (as he would have you think) warm you in winter. "But there is another apartment," through which you drag languidly. It is empty now, being last inhabited by an English Ledi, — and her stove-pipes went out of the windows and blackened the shabby stucco front of the villainous old palace.

In a back court, upon a filthy canal, you chance on a house, the curiously frescoed front of which tempts you within. A building which has a lady and gentleman painted in fresco, and making love from balcony to balcony, on the façade, as well as Arlecchino depicted in the act of leaping from the second to the third story, promises something. Promises something, but does not fulfil the promise. The interior is fresh, clean, and new, and cold and dark as a cellar. This house — that is to say, a floor of the house — you may have for four hundred florins a year; and then farewell the world and the light of the sun! for neither will ever find you in that back court, and you will never see anybody but the neighboring laundresses and their children, who cannot enough admire the front of your house.

E via in seguito! This is of house-keeping, not house-hunting. There are pleasant and habitable houses in Venice, but they are not cheap, as many of the uninhabitable houses also are not. Here, discomfort and ruin have their price, and the tumble-down is patched up and sold at rates astonishing to innocent strangers who come from countries in good repair, where the tumble-down is worth nothing. If I were not ashamed of the idle and foolish old superstitions in which I once believed concerning life in Italy, I would tell how I came gradually to expect very little for a great deal; and how a knowledge of many houses to let made me more and more contented with the house we had taken.

It was in one corner of an old palace on the Grand Canal, and the window of the little parlor looked down upon the water, which had made friends with its painted ceiling, and bestowed tremulous, golden smiles upon it when the sun shone. The dining-room was not so much favored by the water, but it gave upon some green and ever-rustling tree-tops, that rose to it from a tiny garden-ground, no bigger than a pocket handkerchief. Through this window, also, we could

see the quaint, picturesque life of the canal; and from another room we could reach a little terrace above the water. We were not in the *appartamento signorile*,[1] — that was above, — but we were more snugly quartered on the first story from the ground-floor, commonly used as a winter apartment in the old times. But it had been cut up, and suites of rooms had been broken according to the caprice of successive landlords, till it was not at all palatial any more. The upper stories still retained something of former grandeur, and had acquired with time more than former discomfort. We were not envious of them, for they were humbly let at a price less than we paid; though we could not quite repress a covetous yearning for their arched and carven windows, which we saw sometimes from the canal, above the tops of the garden trees.

The gondoliers used always to point out our palace (which was called Casa Falier) as the house in which Marino Faliero was born; and for a long time we clung to the hope that it might be so. But however pleasant it was, we were forced, on reading up the

[1] The noble floor, as the second or third story of the palace is called.

subject a little, to relinquish our allusion, and accredit an old palace at Santi Apostoli with the distinction we would fain have claimed for ours. I am rather at a loss to explain how it made our lives in Casa Falier any pleasanter to think that a beheaded traitor had been born in it, but we relished the superstition amazingly as long as we could possibly believe in it. What went far to confirm us at first in our credulity was the residence, in another part of the palace, of the Canonico Falier, a lineal descendant of the unhappy Doge. He was a very mild-faced old priest, with a white head, which he carried downcast, and crimson legs, on which he moved but feebly. He owned the rooms in which he lived, and the apartment in the front of the palace just above our own. The rest of the house belonged to another; for in Venice many of the palaces are divided up and sold among different purchasers, floor by floor, and sometimes even room by room.

But the tenantry of Casa Falier was far more various than its proprietorship. Over our heads dwelt a Dalmatian family; below our feet a Frenchwoman; at our right, upon the same floor, an English gentleman; under

him a French family; and over him the family of a marquis in exile from Modena. Except with Mr. ——, the Englishman, who was at once our friend and landlord (impossible as this may appear to those who know anything of landlords in Italy), we had no acquaintance, beyond that of salutation, with the many nations represented in our house. We could not help holding the French people in some sort responsible for the invasion of Mexico; and, though opportunity offered for cultivating the acquaintance of the Modenese, we did not improve it.

As for our Dalmatian friends, we met them and bowed to them a great deal, and we heard them overhead in frequent athletic games, involving noise as of the manœuvring of cavalry; and as they stood a good deal on their balcony, and looked down upon us on ours, we sometimes enjoyed seeing them admirably foreshortened, like figures in a frescoed ceiling. The father of this family was a little man of a solemn and impressive demeanor, who had no other occupation but to walk up and down the city and view its monuments, for which purpose, he one day informed us, he had left his native place in Dalmatia, after forty years' study of Vene-

tian history. He further told us that this was by no means worth the time given it; that whereas the streets of Venice were sepulchres in point of narrowness and obscurity, he had a house in Zara, from the windows of which you might see for miles uninterruptedly! This little gentleman wore a black hat, in the last vivid polish of respectability, and I think fortune was not his friend. The hat was too large for him, as the hats of Italians always are; it came down to his eyes, and he carried a cane. Every evening he marched solemnly at the head of a procession of his handsome young children, who went to hear the military music in St. Mark's Square.

The entrance to the house of the Dalmatians — we never knew their names — gave access also to a house in the story above them, which belonged to some mysterious person described on his door-plate as "Co. Prata." I think we never saw Co. Prata himself, and only by chance some members of his family when they came back from their summer in the country to spend the winter in the city. Prata's "Co.," we gradually learnt, meant "Conte," and the little counts and countesses, his children, immediately on their

arrival took an active part in the exercises of the Dalmatian cavalry. Later in the fall, certain of the count's vassals came to the *riva* [1] in one of the great boats of the Po, with a load of brush and corncobs for fuel, — and this is all we ever knew of our neighbors on the fourth floor. As long as he remained "Co." we yearned to know who and what he was; being interpreted as Conte Prata, he ceased to interest us.

Such, then, was the house, and such the neighborhood, in which two little people, just married, came to live in Venice.

They were by nature of the order of shorn lambs, and Providence, tempering the inclemency of the domestic situation, gave them Giovanna.

The house was furnished throughout, and Giovanna had been furnished with it. She was at hand to greet the new-comers, and "This is my wife, the new mistress," said the young *Paron*,[2] with the bashful pride proper to the time and place.

Giovanna glowed welcome, and said, with

[1] The gondola landing-stairs which descend to the water before palace-doors and at the ends of streets.

[2] *Padrone* in Italian. A salutation with Venetian friends, and the title by which Venetian servants always designate their employers.

adventurous politeness, she was very glad of it.

"*Serva sua!*"

The *Parona*, not knowing Italian, laughed in English.

So Giovanna took possession of us, and, acting upon the great truth that handsome is that handsome does, began at once to make herself a thing of beauty.

As a measure of convenience and of deference to her feelings, we immediately resolved to call her G., merely, when speaking of her in English, instead of Giovanna, which would have troubled her with conjecture concerning what was said of her. And as G. thus became the centre around which our domestic life revolved, she must be somewhat particularly treated of in this account of our housekeeping. I suppose that, given certain temperaments and certain circumstances, this would have been much like keeping play-house anywhere; in Venice it had, but for the unmistakable florins it cost, a curious property of unreality and impermanency. It is sufficiently bad to live in a rented house; in a house which you have hired ready-furnished, it is long till your life takes root, and Home

blossoms up in the alien place. For a great while we regarded our house merely as very pleasant lodgings, and we were slow to form any relations which could take from our residence its temporary character. Had we but thought to get in debt to the butcher, the baker, and the grocer, we might have gone far to establish ourselves at once; but we imprudently paid our way, and consequently had no ties to bind us to our fellow-creatures. In Venice provisions are bought by housekeepers on a scale surprisingly small to one accustomed to wholesale American ways, and G., having the purse, made our little purchases in cash, never buying more than enough for one meal at a time. Every morning, the fruits and vegetables are distributed from the great market at the Rialto among a hundred greengrocers' stalls in all parts of the city; bread (which is never made at home) is found fresh at the baker's; there is a butcher's stall in each campo with fresh meat. These shops are therefore resorted to for family supplies day by day; and the poor lay in provisions there in portions graduated to a soldo of their ready means. A great Bostonian, whom I remember to have heard speculate on the superiority of a state

of civilization in which you could buy two cents' worth of beef to that in which so small a quantity was unpurchasable, would find the system perfected here, where you can buy half a cent's worth. It is a system friendly to poverty, and the small retail prices approximate very closely the real value of the stuff sold, as we sometimes proved by offering to purchase in quantity. Usually no reduction would be made from the retail rate, and it was sufficiently amusing to have the dealer figure up the cost of the quantity we proposed to buy, and then exhibit an exact multiplication of his retail rate by our twenty or fifty. Say an orange is worth a soldo: you get no more than a hundred for a florin, though the dealer will cheerfully go under that number if he can cheat you in the count. So in most things we found it better to let G. do the marketing in her own small Venetian fashion, and "guard our strangeness."

But there were some things which must be brought to the house by the dealers, such as water for drinking and cooking, which is drawn from public cisterns in the squares, and carried by stout young girls to all the houses. These *bigolanti* all come from the

A Fruit Stall

mountains of Friuli; they all have rosy cheeks, white teeth, bright eyes, and no waists whatever (in the fashionable sense), but abundance of back. The cisterns are opened about eight o'clock in the morning, and then their day's work begins with chatter, and splashing, and drawing up buckets from the wells; and each sturdy little maiden in turn trots off under a burden of two buckets, — one appended from either end of a bow resting upon the right shoulder. The water is very good, for it is the rain which falls on the shelving surface of the campo, and soaks through a bed of sea-sand around the cisterns into the cool depths below. The *bigolante* comes every morning and empties her brazen buckets into the great picturesque jars of porous earthenware which ornament Venetian kitchens; and the daily supply of water costs a moderate family about a florin a month.

Fuel is likewise brought to your house, but this arrives in boats. It is cut upon the eastern shore of the Adriatic, and comes to Venice in small coasting vessels, each of which has a plump captain in command, whose red face is so cunningly blended with his cap of scarlet flannel that it is hard on a

breezy day to tell where the one begins and the other ends. These vessels anchor off the Custom House in the Giudecca Canal in the fall, and lie there all winter (or until their cargo of fuel is sold), a great part of the time under the charge solely of a small yellow dog of the irascible breed common to the boats of the Po. Thither the smaller dealers in firewood resort, and carry thence supplies of fuel to all parts of the city, melodiously crying their wares up and down the canals, and penetrating the land on foot with specimen bundles of fagots in their arms. They are not, as a class, imaginative, I think, — their fancy seldom rising beyond the invention that their fagots are beautiful and sound and dry. But our particular woodman was, in his way, a gifted man.

Long before I had dealings with him, I knew him by the superb song, or rather incantation, with which he announced his coming on the Grand Canal. The purport of this was merely that his bark was called the Beautiful Caroline, and that his fagots were fine; but he so dwelt upon the hidden beauties of this idea, and so prolonged their effect upon the mind by artful repetition

and the full, round, and resonant roar with which he closed his triumphal hymn, that the spirit was taken with the charm, and held in breathless admiration. By all odds, this woodman's cry was the most impressive of all the street cries of Venice. There may have been an exquisite sadness and sweetness in the wail of the chimney-sweep; a winning pathos in the voice of the vender of roast pumpkin; an oriental fancy and splendor in the fruiterers who cried "Melons with hearts of fire!" and "Juicy pears that bathe your beard!" — there may have been something peculiarly effective in the song of the chestnut-man who shouted "Fat chestnuts," and added, after a lapse in which you got almost beyond hearing, "and well cooked!" — I do not deny that there was a seductive sincerity in the proclamation of one whose peaches could *not* be called beautiful to look upon, and were consequently advertised as "Ugly, but good!" — I say nothing to detract from the merits of harmonious chair-menders; — to my ears the shout of the melodious fisherman was delectable music, and all the birds of summer sang in the voices of the countrymen who sold finches and larks in cages, and roses

and pinks in pots; — but I say, after all, none of these people combined the vocal power, the sonorous movement, the delicate grace, and the vast compass of our woodman. Yet this man, as far as virtue went, was *vox et præterea nihil*. He was a vagabond of the most abandoned; he was habitually in drink, and I think his sins had gone near to make him mad, — at any rate, he was of a most lunatical deportment. In other lands, the man of whom you are a regular purchaser serves you well; in Italy, he conceives that his long service gives him the right to plunder you if possible. I felt in every fibre that this woodman invariably cheated me in measurement, and, indeed, he scarcely denied it on accusation. But my single experience of the more magnificent scoundrels of whom *he* bought the wood originally contented me with the swindle with which I had become familiarized. On this occasion I took a boat and went to the Custom House, to get my fuel at first hand. The captain of the ship which I boarded wished me to pay more than I gave for fuel delivered at my door, and thereupon ensued the tragic scene of bargaining, as these things are conducted in Italy. We stood

up and bargained, we sat down and bargained; the captain turned his back upon me in indignation; I parted from him and took to my boat in scorn; he called me back and displayed the wood, — good, sound, dryer than bones; he pointed to the threatening heavens, and declared that it would snow that night, and on the morrow I could not get wood for twice the present price; but I laughed incredulously. Then my captain took another tack, and tried to make the contract in obsolete currencies, in Austrian pounds, in Venetian pounds; but as I inexorably reduced these into familiar money, he paused desperately, and made me an offer which I accepted with mistaken exultation. For my captain was shrewder than I, and held arts of measurement in reserve against me. He agreed that the measurement and transportation should not cost me the value of his tooth-pick — quite an old and worthless one — which he showed me. Yet I was surprised into the payment of a youth whom this man called to assist at the measurement, and I had to give the boatman drink-money at the end. He promised that the measure should be just: yet if I lifted my eye from the work he placed the logs

slantingly on the measure, and threw in knotty chunks that crowded wholesome fuel out, and let the daylight through and through the pile. I protested, and he admitted the wrong when I pointed it out: "*Ga razon, lu!*" (He 's right!) he said to his fellows in infamy, and throwing aside the objectionable pieces, proceeded to evade justice by new artifices. When I had this memorable load of wood housed at home, I found that it had cost just what I paid my woodman, and that I had additionally lost my self-respect in being plundered before my face, and I resolved thereafter to be cheated in quiet dignity behind my back. The woodman exulted in his restored sovereignty, and I lost nothing in penalty for my revolt.

Among other provisioners who come to your house in Venice are those ancient peasant-women who bring fresh milk in bottles, carefully packed in baskets filled with straw. They set off the whiteness of their wares by the brownness of their sunburnt hands and faces, and bear in their general stoutness and burliness of presence a curious resemblance to their own comfortable bottles. They wear broad straw hats, and dangling ear-rings of yellow gold, and are

the pleasantest sight of the morning streets of Venice, to the stoniness of which they bring a sense of the country's clovery pasturage in the milk just drawn from the great cream-colored cows.

Fishermen also come down the little *calli* — with shallow baskets of fish upon their heads and under either arm, and cry their soles and mackerel to the neighborhood, stopping now and then at some door to bargain away the eels which they chop into sections as the thrilling drama proceeds, and hand over as a denouement at the purchaser's own price. "Beautiful and all alive!" is the engaging cry with which they hawk their fish.

Besides these daily purveyors, there are men of divers arts who come to exercise their crafts at your house: not chimney-sweeps merely, but glaziers, and that sort of workmen, and, best of all, chair-menders, — who bear a mended chair upon their shoulders for a sign, with pieces of white wood for further mending, a drawing-knife, a hammer, and a sheaf of rushes, and who sit down at your door, and plait the rush bottoms of your kitchen-chairs anew, and make heaps of fragrant whittlings with

their knives, and gossip with your serving-woman.

But in the mean time our own serving-woman Giovanna, the great central principle of our housekeeping, is waiting to be personally presented to the company. In Italy there are old crones so haggard that it is hard not to believe them created just as crooked and foul and full of fluff and years as you behold them, and you cannot understand how so much frowziness and so little hair, so great show of fangs and so few teeth, are growths from any ordinary human birth. G. is no longer young, but she is not after the likeness of these old women. It is of a middle age, unbeginning, interminable, of which she gives you the impression. She has brown apple-cheeks, just touched with frost; her nose is of a strawberry formation, abounding in small dints, and having the slightly shrunken effect observable in tardy perfections of the fruit mentioned. A tough, pleasant, indestructible woman — for use, we thought, not ornament — the mother of a family, a good Catholic, and the flower of serving-women.

I do not think that Venetian servants are, as a class, given to pilfering; but knowing

ourselves subject by nature to pillage, we cannot repress a feeling of gratitude to G. that she does not prey upon us. She strictly accounts for all money given her at the close of each week, and to this end keeps a kind of account-book, which I cannot help regarding as in some sort an inspired volume, being privy to the fact, confirmed by her own confession, that G. is not good for reading and writing. On settling with her I have been permitted to look into this book, which is all in capital letters, — each the evident result of serious labor, — with figures representing combinations of the pot-hook according to bold and original conceptions. The spelling is also a remarkable effort of creative genius. The only difficulty under which the author labors in regard to the book is the confusion naturally resulting from the effort to get literature right side up when it has got upside down. The writing is a kind of pugilism — the strokes being made straight out from the shoulder. The account-book is always carried about with her in a fathomless pocket overflowing with the aggregations of a housekeeper who can throw nothing away, to wit: match-boxes, now appointed to hold buttons and hooks-and-eyes;

beeswax in the lump; the door-key (which in Venice takes a formidable size, and impresses you at first sight as ordnance); a patch-bag; a porte-monnaie; many lead-pencils in the stump; scissors, pincushions, and the Beata Vergine in a frame. Indeed, this incapability of throwing things away is made to bear rather severely upon us in some things, such as the continual reappearance of familiar dishes at table, particularly veteran *bifsteca*. But we fancy that the same frugal instinct is exercised to our advantage and comfort in other things, for G. makes a great show and merit of denying our charity to those bold and adventurous children of sorrow who do not scruple to ring your door-bell and demand alms. It is true that with G., as with every Italian, almsgiving enters into the theory and practice of Christian life, but she will not suffer misery to abuse its privileges. She has no hesitation, however, in bringing certain objects of compassion to our notice, and she procures small services to be done for us by many lame and halt of her acquaintance. Having bought my boat (I come, in time, to be willing to sell it again for half its cost to me), I require a menial to clean it now and then, and Giovanna first

calls me a youthful Gobbo for the work, — a festive hunchback, a bright-hearted whistler of comic opera. Whether this blithe humor is not considered decent, I do not know, but though the Gobbo serves me faithfully, I find him one day replaced by a venerable old man, whom — from his personal resemblance to Time — I should think much better occupied with an hour-glass, or engaged with a scythe in mowing me and other mortals down, than in cleaning my boat. But all day long he sits on my *riva* in the sun, when it shines, gazing fixedly at my boat; and when the day is dark, he lurks about the street, accessible to my slightest boating impulse. He salutes my going out and coming in with grave reverence, and I think he has no work to do but that which G.'s wise compassion has given him from me. Suddenly, like the Gobbo, the Veccio also disappears, and I hear vaguely — for in Venice you never know anything with precision — that he has found a regular employment in Padua, and again that he is dead. While he lasts, G. has a pleasant, even a sportive manner with this poor old man, calculated to cheer his declining years; but, as I say, cases of insolent and aggressive misery fail to touch

her. The kind of wretchedness that comes breathing woe and *sciampagnin*[1] under our window, and there spends a leisure hour in the rehearsal of distress, establishes no claim either upon her pity or her weakness. She is deaf to the voice of that sorrow, and the monotonous whine of that dolor cannot move her to the purchase of a guilty tranquillity. I imagine, however, that she is afraid to deny charity to the fat Capuchin friar in spectacles and bare feet, who comes twice a month to levy contributions of bread and fuel for his convent, for we hear her declare from the window that the master is not at home, whenever the good brother rings; and at last, as this excuse gives out, she ceases to respond to his ring at all.

Sometimes, during the summer weather, comes down our street a certain tremulous old troubadour with an aged cithern, on which he strums feebly with bones which remain to him from former fingers, and in a thin, quivering voice pipes wornout ditties of youth and love. Sadder music I have never heard, but though it has at times

[1] Little champagne, — the name which the Venetian populace gave to a fierce and deadly kind of brandy drunk during the scarcity of wine. After the introduction of coal-oil this liquor came to be jocosely known as *petrolio*.

drawn from me the sigh of sensibility without referring sympathy to my pocket, I always hear the compassionate soldo of Giovanna clink reproof to me upon the pavement. Perhaps that slender note touches something finer than habitual charity in her middle-aged bosom, for these were songs, she says, that they used to sing when she was a girl, and Venice was gay and glad, and different from now — *veramente, tutt' altro, signor!*

It is through Giovanna's charitable disposition that we make the acquaintance of two weird sisters, who live not far from us in Calle Falier, and whom we know to this day merely as the Creatures — *creatura* being in the vocabulary of Venetian pity the term for a fellow-being somewhat more pitiable than a *poveretta*. Our Creatures are both well stricken in years, and one of them has some incurable disorder which frequently confines her to the wretched cellar in which they live with the invalid's husband, — a mild, pleasant-faced man, a tailor by trade, and of batlike habits, who hovers about their dusky doorway in the summer twilight. These people have but one room, and a little nook of kitchen at the side; and not only

does the sun never find his way into their habitation, but even the daylight cannot penetrate it. They pay about four florins a month for the place, and I hope their landlord is as happy as his tenants. For though one is sick, and all are wretchedly poor, they are far from being discontented. They are opulent in the possession of a small dog, which they have raised from the cradle, as it were, and adopted into the family. They are never tired of playing with their dog, — the poor old children, — and every slight display of intelligence on his part delights them. They think it fine in him to follow us as we go by, but pretend to beat him; and then they excuse him, and call him ill names, and catch him up, and hug him and kiss him. He feeds upon their slender means and the pickings that G. carefully carries him from our kitchen, and gives to him on our doorstep in spite of us, while she gossips with his mistresses, who chorus our appearance at such times with "*I miei rispetti, signori!*" We often see them in the street, and at a distance from home, carrying mysterious bundles of clothes; and at last we learn their vocation, which is one not known out of Italian cities, I think. There the state

is Uncle to the hard-pressed, and instead of many pawnbrokers' shops there is one large municipal spout, which is called the Monte di Pietà, where the needy pawn their goods. The system is centuries old in Italy, but there are people who to this day cannot summon courage to repair in person to the Mount of Pity, and, to meet their wants, there has grown up a class of frowzy old women who transact the business for them, and receive a small percentage for their trouble. Our poor old Creatures were of this class, and as there were many persons in impoverished, decaying Venice who had need of the succor they procured, they made out to earn a living when both were well, and to eke out existence by charity when one was ill. They were harmless neighbors, and I believe they regretted our removal, when this took place, for they used to sit down under an arcade opposite our new house, and spend the duller intervals of trade in the contemplation of our windows.

The alarming spirit of nepotism which Giovanna developed at a later day was, I fear, a growth from the encouragement we gave her charitable disposition. But for several months it was merely from the fact

of a boy who came and whistled at the door until Giovanna opened it and reproved him in the name of all the saints and powers of darkness, that we knew her to be a mother; and we merely had her word for the existence of a husband, who dealt in poultry. Without seeing Giovanna's husband, I nevertheless knew him to be a man of downy exterior, wearing a canvas apron, thickly crusted with the gore of fowls, who sat at the door of his shop and plucked chickens forever, as with the tireless hand of Fate. I divined that he lived in an atmosphere of scalded pullet; that three earthen cups of clotted chickens' blood, placed upon his window-shelf, formed his idea of an attractive display, and that he shadowed forth his conceptions of the beautiful in symmetrical rows of plucked chickens, presenting to the public eye rear views embellished with a single feather erect in the tail of each bird; that he must be, through the ethics of competition, the sworn foe of those illogical peasants who bring dead poultry to town in cages, like singing birds, and equally the friend of those restaurateurs who furnish you a meal of victuals and a feather-bed in the same *mezzo-pollo arrosto.* He turned

out on actual appearance to be all I had prefigured him, with the additional merit of having a large red nose, a sidelong, fugitive gait, and a hangdog countenance. He furnished us poultry at rates slightly advanced, I think.

As for the boy, he turned up after a while as a constant guest, and took possession of the kitchen. He came near banishment at one time for catching a large number of sea-crabs in the canal, and confining them in a basket in the kitchen, which they left at the dead hour of night, to wander all over our house, — making a mysterious and alarming sound of snapping, like an army of death-watches, and eluding the cunningest efforts at capture. On another occasion, he fell into the canal before our house, and terrified us by going under twice before the arrival of the old gondolier, who called out to him "*Petta! petta!*" (Wait! wait!) as he placidly pushed his boat to the spot. Developing other disagreeable traits, Beppi was finally driven into exile, from which he nevertheless furtively returned on holidays.

The family of Giovanna thus gradually encroaching upon us, we came also to know

her mother, — a dread and loathly old lady, whom we would willingly have seen burned at the stake for a witch. She was commonly encountered at nightfall in our street, where she lay in wait, as it were, to prey upon the fragrance of dinner drifting from the kitchen windows of our neighbor, the Duchess of Parma. Here was heard the voice of cooks and of scullions, and the ecstasies of helpless voracity in which we sometimes beheld this old lady were fearful to witness. Nor did we find her more comfortable in our own kitchen, where we often saw her. The place itself is weird and terrible, — low ceiled, with the stone hearth built far out into the room, and the melodramatic implements of Venetian cookery dangling tragically from the wall. Here is no every-day cheerfulness of cooking-range, but grotesque andirons wading into the bristling embers, and a long crane with villainous pots gibbeted upon it. When Giovanna's mother, then (of the Italian hags, haggard), rises to do us reverence from the darkest corner of this kitchen, and croaks her good wishes for our long life, continued health, and endless happiness, it has the effect upon our spirits of the darkest malediction.

Not more pleasing, though altogether lighter and cheerfuller, was Giovanna's sister-in-law, whom we knew only as the Cognata. Making her appearance first upon the occasion of Giovanna's sickness, she slowly but surely established herself as an habitual presence, and threatened at one time, as we fancied, to become our paid servant. But a happy calamity, which one night carried off a carpet and the window curtains of an unoccupied room, cast an evil suspicion upon the Cognata, and she never appeared after the discovery of the theft. We suspected her of having invented some dishes of which we were very fond, and we hated her for oppressing us with a sense of many surreptitious favors. Objectively, she was a slim, hoopless little woman, with a tendency to be always at the street-door when we opened it. She had a narrow, narrow face, with eyes of terrible slyness, an applausive smile, and a demeanor of slavish patronage. Our kitchen, after her addition to the household, became the banqueting-hall of Giovanna's family, who dined there every day upon dishes of fish and garlic, that gave the house the general savor of a low cook-shop.

As for Giovanna herself, she had the nat-

ural tendency of excellent people to place others in subjection. Our servitude at first was not hard, and consisted chiefly in the stimulation of appetite to extraordinary efforts when G. had attempted to please us with some novelty in cooking. She held us to a strict account in this respect; but indeed our applause was for the most part willing enough. Her culinary execution, first revealing itself in a noble rendering of our ideas of roast potatoes, — a delicacy foreign to the Venetian kitchen, — culminated at last in the same style of *polpetti*[1] which furnished forth the table of our neighbor, the Duchess, and was a perpetual triumph with us.

But G.'s spirit was not wholly that of the serving-woman. We noted in her the liveliness of wit seldom absent from the Italian poor. She was a great babbler, and talked willingly to herself and to inanimate things, when there was no other chance for talk. She was profuse in maledictions of bad weather, which she held up to scorn as that dog of a weather. The crookedness of the

[1] I confess a tenderness for this dish, which is a delicater kind of hash, skilfully flavored and baked in rolls of a mellow complexion and fascinating appearance.

fuel transported her, and she upbraided the fagots as springing from races of ugly old curs. (The vocabulary of Venetian abuse is inexhaustible, and the Venetians invent and combine terms of opprobrium with endless facility, but all abuse begins and ends with the attribution of doggishness.) The conscription was held in the campo near us, and G. declared the place to have become unendurable, — "*proprio un campo di sospiri!*" (Really a field of sighs.) "*Staga comodo!*" she said to a guest of ours who would have moved his chair to let her pass between him and the wall. "Don't move; the way to Paradise is not wider than this."

We sometimes lamented that Giovanna, who did not sleep in the house, should come to us so late in the morning; but we could not deal harshly with her on that account, met, as we always were, with plentiful and admirable excuses. Who were we, indeed, to place our wishes in the balance against the welfare of the sick neighbor with whom Giovanna passed so many nights of vigil? Should we reproach her with tardiness when she had not closed the eye all night for a headache properly of the devil? If she came late in the morning, she stayed late at

night; and it sometimes happened that when the Paron and Parona, supposing her gone, made a stealthy expedition to the kitchen for cold chicken, they found her there at midnight, in the fell company of the Cognata, bibbing the wine of the country, and holding a mild Italian revel with that vinegar and the stony bread of Venice.

I have said G. was the flower of serving-women; and so at first she seemed, and it was long till we doubted her perfection. We knew ourselves to be very young and weak and unworthy. The Parona had the rare gift of learning to speak less and less Italian every day, and fell inevitably into subjection. The Paron in a domestic point of view was naturally nothing. It had been strange indeed if Giovanna, beholding the great contrast we presented to herself in many respects, had forborne to abuse her advantage over us. But we trusted her implicitly, and I hardly know how or when it was that we began to waver in our confidence. It is certain that with the lapse of time we came gradually to have breakfast at twelve o'clock, instead of nine, as we had originally appointed it, and that G. grew to consume the greater part of the day in mak-

ing our small purchases, and to give us our belated dinners at seven o'clock. We protested, and temporary reforms ensued, only to be succeeded by more hopeless lapses; but it was not till all entreaties and threats failed that we began to think seriously it would be well to have done with Giovanna, as an unprofitable servant. I give the result, not all the nice causes from which it came. But the question was, How to get rid of a poor woman and a civil, and the mother of a family dependent in great part upon her labor? We solemnly resolve a hundred times to dismiss G., and we shrink a hundred times from inflicting the blow. At last, somewhat in the spirit of Charles Lamb's Chinaman who invented roast pig, and discovered that the sole method of roasting it was to burn down a house in order to consume the adjacent pig-sty, and thus cook the roaster in the flames, we hit upon an artifice by which we could dispense with Giovanna, and keep an easy conscience. We had long ceased to dine at home, in despair; and now we resolved to take another house, in which there were other servants. But even then, it was a sore struggle to part with the flower of serving-women, who was set

over the vacated house to put it in order after our flitting, and with whom the imprudent Paron settled the last account in the familiar little dining-room, surrounded by the depressing influences of the empty chambers. The place was peopled after all, though we had left it, and I think the tenants who come after us will be haunted by our spectres, crowding them on the pleasant little balcony, and sitting down with them at table. G. stood there, the genius of the place, and wept six regretful tears, each one of which drew a florin from the purse of the Paron. She had hoped to remain with us always while we lived in Venice; but now that she could no longer look to us for support, the Lord must take care of her. The gush of grief was transient: it relieved her, and she came out sunnily a moment after. The Paron went his way more sorrowfully, taking leave at last with the fine burst of Christian philosophy: "We are none of us masters of ourselves in this world, and cannot do what we wish. *Ma! Come si fa? Ci vuol pazienza!*" Yet he was undeniably lightened in heart. He had cut adrift from old moorings, and had crossed the Grand Canal. G. did not follow him, nor

any of the long line of pensioners who used to come on certain feast-days to levy tribute of eggs at the old house. (The postman was among these, on Christmas and New Year's, and as he received eggs at every house, it was a problem with us, unsolved to this hour, how he carried them all, and what he did with them.) Not the least among the Paron's causes for self-gratulation was the non-appearance at his new abode of two local newspapers, for which in an evil hour he subscribed, which were delivered with unsparing regularity, and which, being never read, formed the keenest reproach of his imprudent outlay and his idle neglect of their contents.

VIII

THE BALCONY ON THE GRAND CANAL

THE history of Venice reads like a romance; the place seems a fantastic vision at the best, from which the world must at last awake some morning, and find that after all it has only been dreaming, and that there never was any such city. There our race seems to be in earnest in nothing. People sometimes work, but as if without any aim; they suffer, and you fancy them playing at wretchedness. The Church of St. Mark, standing so solidly, with a thousand years under the feet of its innumerable pillars, is not in the least gray with time, — no grayer than a Greek lyric.

> "All has suffered a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange,"

in this fantastic city. The prose of earth has risen poetry from its baptism in the sea.

And if, living constantly in Venice, you sometimes for a little while forget how marvellous she is, at any moment you may be

startled into vivid remembrance. The cunning city beguiles you street by street, and step by step, into some old court, where a flight of marble stairs leads high up to the pillared gallery of an empty palace, with a climbing vine, green and purple on its old decay, and one or two gaunt trees stretching their heads to look into the lofty windows, — blind long ago to their leafy tenderness, — while at their feet is some sumptuously carven well, with the beauty of the sculptor's soul wrought forever into the stone. Or Venice lures you in a gondola into one of her remote canals, where you glide through an avenue as secret and as still as if sea-deep under our work-day world; where the grim heads carven over the water-gates of the palaces stare at you in austere surprise; where the innumerable balconies are full of the Absences of gay cavaliers and gentle dames, gossiping and making love to one another, from their airy perches. Or if the city's mood is one of bolder charm, she fascinates you in the very places where you think her power is the weakest, and as if impatient of your forgetfulness dares a wilder beauty, and enthralls with a yet more unearthly and incredible enchantment. It is in the Piazza,

and the Austrian band is playing, and the promenaders pace solemnly up and down to the music, and the gentle Italian loafers at Florian's brood vacantly over their little cups of coffee, and nothing can be more stupid; when suddenly everything is changed, and a memorable tournament flashes up in many-glittering action upon the scene, and there upon the gallery of the church, before the horses of bronze, sit the Senators, bright-robed, and in the midst the bonneted Doge with his guest Petrarch at his side. Or the old Carnival, which had six months of every year to riot in, comes back and throngs the place with motley company, — dominoes, harlequins, pantaloni, illustrissimi and illustrissime, and perhaps even the Doge himself, who has the right of incognito when he wears a little mask of wax at his buttonhole. Or may be the grander day revisits Venice when Doria has sent word from his fleet of Genoese at Chioggia that he will listen to the Senate when he has bridled the horses of Saint Mark, — and the whole Republic of rich and poor crowds the square, demanding the release of Pisani, who comes forth from his prison to create victory from the dust of the crumbling commonwealth.

A Water-Gate

But whatever surprise of memorable or beautiful Venice may prepare for your forgetfulness, be sure it will be complete and resistless. Nay, what potenter magic needs my Venice to revivify her past whenever she will than the serpent cunning of her Grand Canal? Launched upon this great S have I not seen hardened travellers grow sentimental, and has not this prodigious sibilant, in my hearing, inspired white-haired Puritan ministers of the gospel to attempt to quote out of the guide-book "that line from Byron"? Upon my word, I have sat beside wandering editors in their gondolas, and witnessed the expulsion of the newspaper from their nature, while, lulled by the fascination of the place, they were powerless to take their own journals from their pockets, and instead of politics talked some bewildered nonsense about coming back with their families next summer. For myself, I must count as half lost the year spent in Venice before I took a house upon the Grand Canal. There alone can existence have the perfect local flavor. But by what witchery touched one's being suffers the common sea-change, till life at last seems to ebb and flow with the tide in that wonder-avenue of

palaces, it would be idle to attempt to tell. I can only take you to our dear little balcony at Casa Falier, and comment not very coherently on the scene upon the water under us.

And I am sure (since it is either in the spring or the fall) you will not be surprised to see, the first thing, a boat-load of those English, who go by from the station to their hotels, every day, in well-freighted gondolas. These parties of travelling Englishry are all singularly alike, from the "Pa'ty" travelling alone with his opera-glass and satchel to the party which fills a gondola with well-cushioned English middle age, ruddy English youth, and substantial English baggage. We have learnt to know them all very well: the father and the mother sit upon the back seat, and their comely girls at the sides and front. These girls all have the honest cabbage-roses of English health upon their cheeks; they all wear little rowdy English hats, and invariable waterfalls of hair tumble upon their broad English backs. They are coming from Switzerland and Germany, and they are going south to Rome and to Naples, and they always pause at Venice a few days. To-morrow we shall see them in the Piazza,

and at Florian's, and St. Mark's, and the Ducal Palace; and the young ladies will cross the Bridge of Sighs, and will sentimentally feed the vagabond pigeons of St. Mark which loaf about the Piazza and defile the sculptures. But now our travellers are themselves very hungry, and are more anxious than Americans can understand about the *table d'hôte* of their hotel. It is perfectly certain that if they fall into talk there with any of our nation, the respectable English father will remark that this war in America is a very sad war, and will ask to know when it will all end. The truth is, Americans do not like these people, and I believe there is no love lost on the other side. But in many things they are travellers to be honored, if not liked: they voyage through all countries, and without awaking fervent affection in any land through which they pass; but their sterling honesty and truth have made the English tongue a draft upon the unlimited confidence of the Continental peoples, and French, Germans, and Italians trust and respect private English faith as cordially as they hate public English perfidy.

They come to Venice chiefly in the autumn,

and October is the month of the Sunsets and the English. The former are best seen from the Public Gardens, whence one looks westward, and beholds them glorious behind the domes and towers of San Giorgio Maggiore and the church of the Redentore. Sometimes, when the sky is clear, your sunset on the lagoon is a fine thing; for then the sun goes down into the water with a broad trail of bloody red behind him, as if, wounded far out at sea, he had dragged himself landward across the crimsoning expanses, and fallen and died as he reached the land. But we (upon whom the idleness of Venice grows daily, and from whom the Gardens, therefore, grow farther and farther) are commonly content to take our bit of sunset as we get it from our balcony, through the avenue opened by the narrow canal opposite. We like the earlier afternoon to have been a little rainy, when we have our sunset splendid as the fury of a passionate beauty, — all tears and fire. There is a pretty but impertinent little palace on the corner which is formed by this canal as it enters the Canalazzo, and from the palace, high over the smaller channel, hangs an airy balcony. When the sunset sky, under and over the balcony, is of that pa-

thetic and angry red which I have tried to figure, we think ourselves rich in the neighborhood of that part of the "Palace of Art," whereon

> "The light aerial gallery, golden railed,
> Burnt like a fringe of fire."

And so, after all, we do not think we have lost any greater thing in not seeing the sunset from the Gardens, where half a dozen artists are always painting it, or from the quay of the Zattere, where it is splendid over and under the island church of San Giorgio in Alga.

It is only the English and the other tourist strangers who go by upon the Grand Canal during the day. But in the hours just before the summer twilight the gondolas of the citizens appear, and then you may see whatever is left of Venetian gayety, and looking down upon the groups in the open gondolas may witness something of the home-life of the Italians, who live out-of-doors.

The groups do not vary a great deal one from another: inevitably the pale-faced papa, the fat mamma, the overdressed, handsome young girls. We learned to look for certain gondolas, and grew to feel a fond interest in a very mild young man who took the air in

company and contrast with a ferocious bull-dog, — boule-dogue he called him, I suppose. He was always smoking languidly, that mild young man, and I fancied I could read in his countenance a gentle, gentle antagonism to life, — the proportionate Byronic misanthropy, which might arise from sugar and water taken instead of gin. But we really knew nothing about him, and our conjecture was conjecture. Officers went by in their brilliant uniforms, and gave the scene an alien splendor. Among these we enjoyed best the spectacle of an old major, or perhaps general, in whom the arrogance of youth had stiffened into a chill hauteur, and who frowned above his gray overwhelming mustache upon the passers, like a citadel grim with battle and age. We used to fancy, with a certain luxurious sense of our own safety, that one broadside from those fortressed eyes could blow from the water the slight pleasure-boats in which the young Venetian idlers were innocently disporting. But again this was merely conjecture. The general's glance may have had no such power. Indeed, the furniture of our apartment sustained no damage from it, even when concentrated through an opera-glass, by which

means the brave officer at times perused our humble lodging from the balcony of his own over against us. He may have been no more dangerous in his way than two aged sisters (whom we saw every evening) were in theirs. They represented Beauty in its most implacable and persevering form, and perhaps they had one day been belles and could not forget it. They were very old indeed, but their dresses were new and their paint fresh, and as they glided by in the good-natured twilight one had no heart to smile at them. We gave our smiles, and now and then our soldi, to the swarthy beggar, who, being short of legs, rowed up and down the canal in a boat, and overhauled Charity in the gondolas. He was a singular compromise, in his vocation and his equipment, between the mendicant and corsair: I fear he would not have hesitated to assume the pirate altogether in lonelier waters; and had I been a heavily laden oyster-boat returning by night through some remote and dark canal, I would have steered clear of that truculent-looking craft, of which the crew must have fought with a desperation proportioned to the lack of legs and the difficulty of running away, in case of defeat.

About nightfall came the market boats on their way to the Rialto market, bringing heaped fruits and vegetables from the mainland; and far into the night the soft dip of the oar and the gurgling progress of the boats were company and gentlest lullaby. By which time, if we looked out again, we found the moon risen, and the ghost of dead Venice shadowily happy in haunting the lonesome palaces, and the sea, which had so loved Venice, kissing and caressing the tide-worn marble steps where her feet seemed to rest.

At night sometimes we saw from our balcony one of those *freschi*, which once formed the chief splendor of festive occasions in Venice, and are peculiar to the city, where alone their fine effects are possible. The fresco is a procession of boats with music and lights. Two immense barges, illumined with hundreds of paper lanterns, carry the military bands; the boats of the civil and military dignitaries follow, and then the gondolas of such citizens as choose to take part in the display, — though since 1859 no Italian, unless a government official, has been seen in the procession. No gondola has less than two lanterns, and many have eight or ten, shedding mellow lights of blue and red and

purple, over uniforms and silken robes. The soldiers of the bands breathe from their instruments music the most perfect and exquisite of its kind in the world; and as the procession takes the width of the Grand Canal in its magnificent course, soft crimson flushes play upon the old, weather-darkened palaces, and die tenderly away, giving to light and then to shadow the opulent sculptures of pillar and arch and spandrel, and weirdly illuminating the grim and bearded visages of stone that peer down from doorway and window. It is a sight more gracious and fairy than ever poet dreamed; and I feel that the lights and the music have only got into my description by name, and that you would not know them when you saw and heard them, from anything I say. In other days, people tell you, the fresco was much more impressive than now. At intervals, rockets used to be sent up, and the Bengal lights, burned during the progress of the boats, threw the gondoliers' spectral shadows, giant-huge, on the palace walls. But, for my part, I do not care to have the fresco other than I know it: indeed, for my own selfish pleasure, I should be sorry to have Venice in any way less fallen and forlorn than she is.

Without doubt the most picturesque craft ever seen on the Grand Canal are the great boats of the river Po, which, crossing the lagoons from Chioggia, come up to the city with the swelling sea. They are built with a pointed stern and bow rising with the sweep of a short curve from the water high above the cabin roof, which is always covered with a straw matting. Black is not the color of the gondolas alone, but of all boats in Venetia; and these of the Po are like immense funeral barges, and any one of them might be sent to take King Arthur and bear him to Avilon, whither I think most of them are bound. A path runs along either gunwale, on which the men pace as they pole the boat up the canal, — her great sail folded and lying with the prostrate mast upon the deck. The rudder is a prodigious affair, and the man at the helm is commonly kind enough to wear a red cap with a blue tassel, and to smoke. The other persons on board are not less obliging and picturesque, from the dark-eyed young mother who sits with her child in her arms at the cabin-door, to the bronze boy who figures in play at her feet with a small yellow dog of the race already noticed in charge of the fuel-boats

from Dalmatia. The father of the family, whom we take to be the commander of the vessel, occupies himself gracefully in sitting down and gazing at the babe and its mother. It is an old habit of mine, formed in childhood from looking at rafts upon the Ohio, to attribute, with a kind of heart-ache, supreme earthly happiness to the navigators of lazy river craft; and as we glance down upon these people from our balcony, I choose to think them immensely contented, and try, in a feeble, tacit way, to make friends with so much bliss. But I am always repelled in these advances by the small yellow dog, who is rendered extremely irascible by my contemplation of the boat under his care, and who, ruffling his hair as a hen ruffles her feathers, never fails to bark furious resentment of my longing.

Far different from the picture presented by this boat's progress — the peacefulness of which even the bad temper of the small yellow dog could not mar — was another scene which we witnessed upon the Grand Canal, when one morning we were roused from our breakfast by a wild and lamentable outcry. Two large boats, attempting to enter the small canal opposite at the same

time, had struck together with a violence that shook the boatmen to their inmost souls. One barge was laden with lime, and belonged to a plasterer of the city; the other was full of fuel, and commanded by a virulent rustic. These rival captains advanced toward the bows of their boats, with murderous looks,

> "Con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame,
> Sì che parea che l'aer ne temesse,"

and there stamped furiously, and beat the wind with hands of deathful challenge, while I looked on with that noble interest which the enlightened mind always feels in people about to punch each other's heads.

But the storm burst in words.

"Figure of a pig!" shrieked the Venetian, "you have ruined my boat forever!"

"Thou liest, son of an ugly old dog!" returned the countryman, "and it was my right to enter the canal first."

They then, after this exchange of insult, abandoned the main subject of dispute, and took up the quarrel laterally and in detail. Reciprocally questioning the reputation of all their female relatives to the third and fourth cousins, they defied each other as the offspring of assassins and prostitutes. As

the peace-making tide gradually drifted their boats asunder, their anger rose, and they danced back and forth and hurled opprobrium with a foamy volubility that quite left my powers of comprehension behind. At last the townsman, executing a *pas seul* of uncommon violence, stooped and picked up a bit of lime, while the countryman, taking shelter at the stern of his boat, there attended the shot. To my infinite disappointment it was not fired. The Venetian seemed to have touched the climax of his passion in the mere demonstration of hostility, and gently gathering up his oar gave the countryman the right of way. The courage of the latter rose as the danger passed, and as far as he could be heard he continued to exult in the wildest excesses of insult: "Ah-heigh! brutal executioner! Ah, hideous headsman!" *Da capo.* I now know that these people never intended to do more than quarrel, and no doubt they parted as well pleased as if they had actually carried broken heads from the encounter. But at the time I felt affronted and trifled with by the result, for my disappointments arising out of the dramatic manner of the Italians had not yet been frequent enough to teach me to expect nothing from it.

There was some compensation for me — coming, like all compensation, a long while after the loss — in the spectacle of a funeral procession on the Grand Canal, which had a singular and imposing solemnity only possible to the place. It was the funeral of an Austrian general, whose coffin, mounted on a sable catafalco, was borne upon the middle boat of three that moved abreast. The barges on either sides bristled with the bayonets of soldiery, but the dead man was alone in his boat, except for one strange figure that stood at the head of the coffin, and rested its glittering hand upon the black fall of the drapery. This was a man clad *cap-a-pie* in a perfect suit of gleaming mail, with his visor down, and his shoulders swept by the heavy raven plumes of his helm. As at times he moved from side to side, and glanced upward at the old palaces, sad in the yellow morning light, he put out of sight, for me, everything else upon the canal, and seemed the ghost of some crusader come back to Venice, in wonder if this city, lying dead under the hoofs of the Croat, were indeed that same haughty Lady of the Sea who had once sent her blind old Doge to beat down the pride of an empire and disdain its crown.

IX

A DAYBREAK RAMBLE

ONE summer morning the mosquitoes played for me with sleep, and won. It was half past four, and as it had often been my humor to see Venice at that hour I got up and sallied forth for a stroll through the city.

This morning walk did not lay the foundation of a habit of early rising in me, but I nevertheless advise people always to get up at half past four, if they wish to receive the most vivid impressions, and to take the most absorbing interest in everything in the world. It was with a feeling absolutely novel that I looked about me that morning, and there was a breezy freshness and clearness in my perceptions altogether delightful, and I fraternized so cordially with Nature that I do not think, if I had sat down immediately after to write out the experience, I should have at all patronized her, as I am afraid scribbling people have sometimes the custom to do.

I know that my feeling of brotherhood in the case of two sparrows, which obliged me by hopping down from a garden wall at the end of Calle Falier and promenading on the pavement, was quite humble and sincere; and that I resented the ill-nature of a cat,

"Whom love kept wakeful and the muse,"

and who at that hour was spitefully reviling the morn from a window grating. As I went by the gate of the Canonico's little garden, the flowers saluted me with a breath of perfume, — I think the white honeysuckle was first to offer me this politeness, — and the dumpy little statues looked far more engaging than usual.

After passing the bridge, the first thing to do was to drink a cup of coffee at the Caffè Ponte di Ferro, where the eyebrows of the waiter expressed a mild surprise at my early presence. There was no one else in the place but an old gentleman talking thoughtfully to himself on the subject of two florins, while he poured his coffee into a glass of water, before drinking it. As I lingered a moment over my cup, I was reinforced by the appearance of a company of soldiers, marching to parade in the Campo di Marte. Their

officers went at their head, laughing and chatting, and one of the lieutenants, smoking a long pipe, gave me a feeling of satisfaction only comparable to that which I experienced shortly afterward in beholding a stoutly built small dog on the Ponte di San Moisè. The creature was only a few inches high, and it must have been through some mist of dreams yet hanging about me that he impressed me as having something elephantine in his manner. When I stooped down and patted him on the head, I felt colossal.

On my way to the Piazza, I stopped in the church of Saint Mary of the Lily, where, in company with one other sinner, I found a relish in the early sacristan's deliberate manner of lighting the candles on the altar. Saint Mary of the Lily has a façade in the taste of the declining Renaissance. The interior is in perfect keeping, and all is hideous, abominable, and abandoned. My fellow-sinner was kneeling, and repeating his prayers. He now and then tapped himself absent-mindedly on the breast and forehead, and gave a good deal of his attention to me as I stood at the door, hat in hand. The hour and the place invested him with so much interest that I parted from him with

emotion. My feelings were next involved by an abrupt separation from a young English East-Indian, whom I overheard asking the keeper of a *caffè* his way to the Campo di Marte. He was a claret-colored young fellow, tall, and wearing folds of white muslin around his hat. In another world I trust to know how he liked the parade that morning.

I discovered that Piazza San Marco is every morning swept by troops of ragged *facchini*, who gossip noisily and quarrelsomely together over their work. Bootblacks, also, were in attendance, and several followed my progress through the square, in the vague hope that I would relent and have my boots blacked. One peerless waiter stood alone amid the desert elegance of Caffè Florian, which is never shut, day or night, from year to year. At the Caffè of the Greeks, two individuals of the Greek nation were drinking coffee.

I went upon the Molo, passing between the pillars of the Lion and the Saint, and walked freely back and forth, taking in the glory of that prospect of water and of vague islands breaking the silver of the lagoons, like those scenes cunningly wrought in ap-

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THE BENIGN HOWELLS.

"He belongs to the whole of America, and if there was a local touch a tang in him of some strong and native soil, it came from Ohio

year begins the process of appraisement of his place in American literature. His great age as well as his immense achievement has long placed him as our foremost man of letters. The value of his work will now come into a period of severer testing, since it is recognized that he painted an age that has passed. New ideals occupy the newer generation, and their tendency is to rank an artist as better or worse as he expresses their own views of life. Mr. Henry Holt, the publisher near to Mr. Howells's own age, does not give way to the present generation. As quoted in the New York *Evening Post*, Mr. Holt sees Mr. Howells as "the last

parent relief on old Venetian mirrors. I walked there freely, for though there were already many gondoliers at the station, not one took me for a foreigner or offered me a boat. At that hour, I was in myself so improbable that, if they saw me at all, I must have appeared to them as a dream. My sense of security was sweet, but it was false, for, on going into the church of St. Mark, the keener eye of the sacristan detected me. He instantly offered to show me the Zeno Chapel; but I declined, preferring the church, where I found the space before the high altar filled with market-people come to hear the early mass. As I passed out of the church, I witnessed the partial awaking of a Venetian gentleman who had spent the night in a sitting posture, between the columns of the main entrance. He looked puffy, scornful, and uncomfortable, and at the moment of falling back to slumber tried to smoke an unlighted cigarette, which he held between his lips. I found none of the shops open as I passed through the Merceria, and but for myself, and here and there a laborer going to work, the busy thoroughfare seemed deserted. In the mere wantonness of power and the security of solitude,

I indulged myself in snapping several door-latches, which gave me a pleasure as keen as that enjoyed in boyhood from passing a stick along the pickets of a fence. I was in no wise abashed to be discovered in this amusement by an old peasant-woman, bearing at either end of a yoke the usual basket with bottles of milk packed in straw.

Entering Campo San Bartolomeo, I found trade already astir in that noisy place; the voice of cheap bargains, which by noonday swells into an intolerable uproar, was beginning to be heard. Having lived in Campo San Bartolomeo, I recognized several familiar faces there, and particularly noted among them that of a certain fruit-vender, who frequently swindled me in my small dealings with him. He now sat before his stand, and for a man of a fat and greasy presence looked very fresh and brisk, and as if he had passed a pleasant night.

On the other side of the Rialto Bridge, the market was preparing for the purchasers. Butchers were arranging their shops; fruit-stands, and stands for the sale of crockery, and — as I must say for want of a better word, if there is any — notions, were in a state of tasteful readiness. The person on

the steps of the bridge, who had exposed his stock of cheap clothing and coarse felt hats on the parapet, had so far completed his preparations as to have leisure to be talking himself hot and hoarse with the neighboring barber. He was in a perfectly good humor, and was merely giving a dramatic flavor to some question of six soldi.

At the landings of the market-place, squadrons of boats loaded with vegetables were arriving and unloading. Peasants were building cabbages into pyramids; collective squashes and cucumbers were taking a picturesque shape; wreaths of garlic and garlands of onions graced the scene. All the people were clamoring at the tops of their voices; and in the midst of the tumult and confusion, resting on heaps of cabbage-leaves and garbage, men lay on their bellies sweetly sleeping. Numbers of eating-houses were sending forth a savory smell, and everywhere were breakfasters with bowls of *sguassetto*. In one of the shops, somewhat prouder than the rest, a heated brunette was turning sections of eel on a gridiron, and hurriedly coquetting with the purchasers. Singularly calm amid all this bustle was the countenance of the statue called the Gobbo, as I

looked at it in the centre of the market-place. The Gobbo (who is not a hunch-back, either) was patiently supporting his burden, and looking with a quiet, thoughtful frown upon the ground, as if pondering some dream of change that had come to him since the statutes of the haughty Republic were read aloud to the people from the stone tribune on his shoulders.

Indeed, it was a morning for thoughtful meditation; and as I sat at the feet of the four granite kings shortly after, waiting for the gate of the Ducal Palace to be opened, that I might see the girls drawing the water, I studied the group of the Judgment of Solomon, on the corner of the palace, and arrived at an entirely new interpretation of that Bible story, which I have now wholly forgotten.

The gate remained closed too long for my patience, and I turned away from a scene momently losing its interest. The brilliant little shops opened like hollyhocks as I went home; the swelling tide of life filled the streets, and brought Venice back to my day-time remembrance, robbing her of that keen, delightful charm with which she greeted my early morning sense.

X

THE MOUSE

WISHING to tell the story of our Mouse, because I think it illustrates some amusing traits of character in a certain class of Italians, I explain at once that he was not a mouse, but a man so called from his wretched, trembling little manner, his fugitive expression and peaked visage.

He first appeared to us on the driver's seat of that carriage in which we posted so splendidly one spring-time from Padua to Ponte Lagoscuro. But though he mounted to his place just outside the city gate, we did not regard him much, nor, indeed, observe what a mouse he was, until the driver stopped to water his horses near Battaglia, and the Mouse got down to stretch his forlorn little legs. Then I got down, too, and bade him good-day, and told him it was a very hot day, — for he was a mouse apparently so plunged in wretchedness that

I doubted if he knew what kind of day it was.

When I had spoken, he began to praise (in the wary manner of the Venetians when they find themselves in the company of a foreigner who does not look like an Englishman) the Castle of the Obizzi near by, which is now the country-seat of the ex-Duke of Modena; and he presently said something to imply that he thought me a German.

"But I am not a German," said I.

"As many excuses," said the Mouse sadly, but with evident relief; and then began to talk more freely, and of the evil times.

"Are you going all the way with us to Florence?" I asked.

"No, signor, to Bologna; from there to Ancona."

"Have you ever been in Venice? We are just coming from there."

"Oh, yes."

"It is a beautiful place. Do you like it?"

"Sufficiently. But one does not enjoy himself very well there."

"But I thought Venice interesting."

"Sufficiently, signor. *Ma!*" said the Mouse, shrugging his shoulders, and putting

on the air of being luxuriously fastidious in his choice of cities, "the water is so bad in Venice."

The Mouse is dressed in a heavy winter overcoat, and has no garment to form a compromise with his shirt-sleeves, if he should wish to render the weather more endurable by throwing off the surtout. In spite of his momentary assumption of consequence, I suspect that his coat is in the Monte di Pietà. It comes out directly that he is a ship-carpenter who has worked in the Arsenal of Venice and at the ship-yards in Trieste.

But there is no work any more. He went to Trieste lately to get a job on the three frigates which the Sultan had ordered to be built there. *Ma!* After all, the frigates are to be built in Marseilles instead. There is nothing. And everything is so dear. In Venetia you spend much and gain little. Perhaps there is work at Ancona.

By this time the horses are watered; the Mouse regains his seat, and we almost forget him, till he jumps from his place, just before we reach the hotel in Rovigo, and disappears — down the first hole in the side of a house, perhaps. He might have done

much worse, and spent the night at the hotel, as we did.

The next morning at four o'clock, when we start, he is on the box again, nibbling bread and cheese, and glancing furtively back at us to say good-morning. He has little twinkling black eyes, just like a mouse, and a sharp mustache, and sharp tuft on his chin, — as like Victor Emanuel's as a mouse's tuft can be.

The cold morning air seems to shrivel him, and he crouches into a little gelid ball on the seat beside the driver, while we wind along the Po on the smooth gray road; while the twilight lifts slowly from the distances of field and vineyard; while the black boats of the Po, with their gaunt white sails, show spectrally through the mists; while the trees and the bushes break into innumerable voice, and the birds are glad of another day in Italy; while the peasant drives his mellow-eyed, dun oxen afield; while his wife comes in her scarlet bodice to the door, and the children's faces peer out from behind her skirts; while the air freshens, the east flushes, and the great miracle is wrought anew.

Once again, before we reach the ferry of

the Po, the Mouse leaps down and disappears as mysteriously as at Rovigo. We see him no more till we meet in the station on the other side of the river, where we hear him bargaining long and earnestly with the ticket-seller for a third-class passage to Bologna. He fails to get it, I think, at less than the usual rate, for he retires from the contest more shrunken and forlorn than ever, and walks up and down the station, startled at a word, shocked at any sudden noise.

For curiosity, I ask how much he paid for crossing the river, mentioning the fabulous sum it had cost us.

It appears that he paid sixteen soldi only. "What could they do when a man was in misery? I had nothing else."

Even while thus betraying his poverty the Mouse did not beg, and we began to respect his poverty. In a little while we pitied it, witnessing the manner in which he sat down on the edge of a chair, with a smile of meek desperation.

It is a more serious case when an artisan is out of work in the Old World than one can understand in the New. There the struggle for bread is so fierce and the competition so great; and, then, a man bred to

one trade cannot turn his hand to another, as in America. Even the rudest and least skilled labor has more to do it than are wanted. The Italians are very good to the poor, but the tradesman out of work must become a beggar before charity can help him.

We, who are poor enough to be wise, consult foolishly together concerning the Mouse. It blesses him that gives and him that takes, — this business of charity. And then, there is something irresistibly relishing and splendid in the consciousness of being the instrument of a special providence! Have I all my life admired those beneficent characters in novels and comedies who rescue innocence, succor distress, and go about pressing gold into the palm of poverty, and telling it to take it and be happy, and now shall I reject an occasion, made to my hand, for emulating them in real life?

"I think I will give the Mouse five francs," I say.

"Yes, certainly."

"But I will be prudent," I continue. "I will not *give* him this money. I will tell him it is a loan which he may pay me back again whenever he can. In this way I shall

relieve him now and furnish him an incentive to economy."

I call to the Mouse, and he runs tremulously toward me.

"Have you friends in Ancona?"

"No, signor."

"How much money have you left?"

He shows me three soldi. "Enough for a coffee."

"And then?"

"God knows."

So I give him the five francs, and explain my little scheme of making it a loan, and not a gift; and then I give him my address.

He does not appear to understand the scheme of the loan; but he takes the money, and is quite stunned by his good fortune. He thanks me absently, and goes and shows the piece to the guards, with a smile that illumines and transfigures his whole person. At Bologna, he has come to his senses; he loads me with blessings, he is ready to weep; he reverences me, he wishes me a good voyage, endless prosperity, and innumerable days; and takes the train for Ancona.

"Ah, ah!" I congratulate myself, — "is it not a fine thing to be the instrument of a special providence?"

It is pleasant to think of the Mouse during all that journey, and if we are never so tired it rests us to say, "I wonder where the Mouse is by this time?" When we get home, and coldly count up our expenses, we rejoice in the five francs lent to the Mouse. "And I know he will pay it back if ever he can," I say. "That was a Mouse of integrity."

Two weeks later comes a comely young woman, with a young child, — a child strong on its legs, a child which tries to open everything in the room, which wants to pull the cloth off the table, to throw itself out of the open window, — a child of which I have never seen the peer for restlessness and curiosity. This young woman has been directed to call on me as a person likely to pay her way to Ferrara.

"But who sent you? But, in fine, why should I pay your way to Ferrara? I have never seen you before."

"My husband, whom you benefited on his way to Ancona, sent me. Here is his letter and the card you gave him."

I call out to my fellow-victim, "My dear, here is news of the Mouse!"

"Don't *tell* me he 's sent you that money already!"

"Not at all. He has sent me his wife and child, that I may forward them to him at Ferrara, out of my goodness and the boundless prosperity which has followed his good wishes, — I, who am a great signor in his eyes, and an insatiable giver of five-franc pieces, — the instrument of a perpetual special providence. The Mouse has found work at Ferrara, and his wife comes here from Trieste. As for the rest, I am to send her to him, as I said."

"You are deceived," I say solemnly to the Mouse's wife. "I am not a rich man. I lent your husband five francs because he had nothing. I am sorry; but I cannot spare twenty florins to send you to Ferrara. If *one* will help you?"

"Thanks the same," said the young woman, who was well dressed enough; and blessed me, and gathered up her child, and went her way.

But her blessing did not lighten my heart, depressed and troubled by so strange an end to my little scheme of a beneficent loan. After all, perhaps the Mouse may have been as keenly disappointed as myself. With the ineradicable idea of the Italians, that persons who speak English are wealthy by

nature, and *tutti originali*, it was not such an absurd conception of the case to suppose that if I had lent him five francs once I should like to do it continually. Perhaps he may yet pay back the loan with usury. But I doubt it. In the mean time, I am far from blaming the Mouse. I merely feel that there is a misunderstanding, which I can pardon if he can.

XI

CHURCHES AND PICTURES

ONE day, in the gallery of the Venetian Academy, a family party of the English, whom we had often seen from our balcony in their gondolas, were kind enough to pause before Titian's John the Baptist. It was attention that the picture could scarcely demand in strict justice, for it hangs at the end of a suite of smaller rooms, through which visitors usually return from the great halls spent with looking at much larger paintings. As these people stood gazing at the sublime figure of the Baptist, — one of the most impressive, if not the most religious, that the master has painted, — and the wild and singular beauty of the landscape made itself felt through the infinite depths of their respectability, the father of the family and the head of the group uttered approval of the painter's conception: "Quite my idea of the party's character," he said;

and then silently and awfully led his domestic train away.

I am so far from deriding the criticism of this honest gentleman that I would wish to have equal sincerity and boldness in saying what I thought — if I really thought anything at all — concerning the art which I spent so great a share of my time at Venice in looking at. But I fear I should fall short of the terseness as well as the candor I applaud, and should presently find myself tediously rehearsing criticisms which I neither respect for their honesty nor regard for their justice. It is the sad fortune of him who desires to arrive at full perception of the true and beautiful in art to find that critics have no agreement except upon a few loose general principles; and that among the artists, to whom he turns in his despair, no two think alike concerning the same master, while his own little learning has made him distrust his natural likings and mislikings. Ruskin is undoubtedly the best guide you can have in your study of the Venetian painters; and after reading him, and suffering confusion and ignominy from his theories and egotisms, the exercises by which you are chastised into admission that

he has taught you anything cannot fail to end in a humility very favorable to your future as a Christian. But even in this subdued state you must distrust the methods by which he pretends to relate the æsthetic truths you perceive to certain civil and religious conditions: you scarcely understand how Tintoretto, who genteelly disdains (on one page) to paint well any person baser than a saint or senator, and with whom "exactly in proportion to the dignity of the character is the beauty of the painting," comes (on the next page) to paint a very "weak, mean, and painful" figure of Christ; and knowing a little the loose lives of the great Venetian painters, you must reject, with several other humorous postulates, the idea that good colorists are better men than bad colorists. Without any guide, I think, these painters may be studied and understood, up to a certain point, by one who lives in the atmosphere of their art at Venice, and who, insensibly breathing in its influence, acquires a feeling for it which all the critics in the world could not impart where the works themselves are not to be seen. I am sure that no one strange to the profession of artist ever received a just no-

tion of any picture by reading the most accurate and faithful description of it: stated dimensions fail to convey ideas of size; adjectives are not adequate to the ideas of movement; and the names of the colors, however artfully and vividly introduced and repeated, cannot tell the reader of a painter's coloring. I should be glad to hear what Titian's Assumption is like from some one who knew it by descriptions. Can any one who has seen it tell its likeness, or forget it? Can any cunning critic describe intelligibly the difference between the styles of Titian, of Tintoretto, and of Paolo Veronese, — that difference which no one with the slightest feeling for art can fail to discern after looking thrice at their works? It results from all this that I must believe special criticisms on art to have their small use only in the presence of the works they discuss. This is my sincere belief, and I could not, in any honesty, lumber my pages with descriptions or speculations which would be idle to most readers, even if I were a far wiser judge of art than I affect to be. As it is, doubting if I be gifted in that way at all, I think I may better devote myself to discussion of such things in Venice as can

be understood by comparison with things elsewhere, and so rest happy in the thought that I have thrown no additional darkness on any of the pictures half obscured now by the religious dimness of the Venetian churches.

Doubt, analogous to that expressed, has already made me hesitate to spend the reader's patience upon many well-known wonders of Venice; and, looking back over the preceding chapters, I find that some of the principal edifices of the city have scarcely got into my book even by name. It is possible that the reader, after all, loses nothing by this; but I should regret it, if it seemed ingratitude to that expression of the beautiful which beguiled many dull hours for me, and kept me company in many lonesome ones. For kindnesses of this sort, indeed, I am under obligations to edifices in every part of the city; and there is hardly a bit of sculptured stone in the Ducal Palace to which I do not owe some pleasant thought or harmless fancy. Yet I am shy of endeavoring, in my gratitude, to transmute the substance of the Ducal Palace into some substance that shall be sensible to the eyes that look on this print; and I forgive myself

the reluctance the more readily when I remember how, just after reading Mr. Ruskin's description of St. Mark's Church, I, who had seen it every day for three years, began to have dreadful doubts of its existence.

To be sure, this was only for a moment, and I do not think all the descriptive talent in the world could make me again doubt St. Mark's, which I remember with no less love than veneration. This church indeed has a beauty which touches and wins all hearts, while it appeals profoundly to the religious sentiment. It is as if there were a sheltering friendliness in its low-hovering domes and arches, which lures and caresses while it awes; as if here, where the meekest soul feels welcome and protection, the spirit oppressed with the heaviest load of sin might creep nearest to forgiveness, hiding the anguish of its repentance in the temple's dim cavernous recesses, faintly starred with mosaic, and twilighted by twinkling altar-lamps.

Though the temple is enriched with incalculable value of stone and sculpture, I cannot remember at any time to have been struck by its mere opulence. Preciousness of material has been sanctified to the highest uses, and there is such unity and justness in

the solemn splendor that wonder is scarcely appealed to. Even the priceless and rarely seen treasures of the church — such as the famous golden altar-piece, whose costly blaze of gems and gold was lighted in Constantinople six hundred years ago — failed to impress me with their pecuniary worth, though I

> "Value the giddy pleasure of the eyes,"

and like to marvel at precious things. The jewels of other churches are conspicuous and silly heaps of treasure; but St. Mark's, where every line of space shows delicate labor in rich material, subdues the jewels to their place of subordinate adornment. So, too, the magnificence of the Romish service seems less vainly ostentatious there. In other churches the ceremonies may sometimes impress you with a sense of their grandeur, and even spirituality, but they all need the effect of twilight upon them. You want a foreground of kneeling figures, and faces half visible through heavy bars of shadow; little lamps must tremble before the shrines; and in the background must rise the high altar, all ablaze with candles from vault to pavement, while a hidden choir pours music from behind, and the organ shakes the heart with

its heavy tones. But with the daylight on its splendors even the grand function of the Te Deum fails to awe, and wearies by its length, except in St. Mark's alone, which is given grace to spiritualize what elsewhere would be mere theatric pomp.[1] The basilica, however, is not in everything the edifice best adapted to the Romish worship; for the incense, which is a main element of the function, is gathered and held there in choking clouds under the low wagon-roofs of the cross-naves. — Yet I do not know if I would banish incense from the formula of worship even in St. Mark's. There is certainly a poetic if not a religious grace in the swinging censer and its curling fumes; and I think the perfume, as it steals mitigated to your nostrils, out of the open church door, is the reverendest smell in the world.

[1] The cardinal-patriarch officiates in the Basilica San Marco with some ceremonies which I believe are peculiar to the patriarchate of Venice, and which consist of an unusual number of robings and disrobings, and putting on and off of shoes. All this is performed with great gravity, and has, I suppose, some peculiar spiritual significance. The shoes are brought by a priest to the foot of the patriarchal throne, when a canon removes the profane, out-of-door *chaussure*, and places the sacred shoes on the patriarch's feet. A like ceremony replaces the patriarch's every-day gaiters, and the pious rite ends.

St. Mark's during Service

The music in Venetian churches is not commonly very good: the best is to be heard at St. Mark's, though the director of the choir always contrives to make so odious a slapping with his *bâton* as nearly to spoil your enjoyment. The great musical event of the year is the performance (immediately after the Festa del Redentore) of the Soldini Masses. These are offered for the repose of one Giuseppe Soldini of Verona, who, dying possessed of about a million francs, bequeathed a part (some six thousand francs) annually to the church of St. Mark, on conditions named in his will. The terms are that during three successive days, every year, there shall be said for the peace of his soul a certain number of masses, — all to be done in the richest and costliest manner. In case of delinquency, the bequest passes to the Philharmonic Society of Milan; but the priesthood of the basilica so strictly regard the wishes of the deceased that they never say less than four masses over and above the prescribed number.[1]

[1] After hearing these masses, curiosity led me to visit the Casa di Ricovero, in order to look at Soldini's will, and there I had the pleasure of recognizing the constantly recurring fact that beneficent humanity is of all countries and religions. The Casa di Ricovero is an immense edifice dedicated to the

As there is so little in St. Mark's of the paltry or revolting character of modern Romanism, one would form too exalted an idea of the dignity of Catholic worship if he judged it there. The truth is, the sincerity and nobility of a spirit well-nigh unknown to the Romish faith of these times are the ruling influences in that temple: the past lays its spell upon the present, transfiguring it, and the sublimity of the early faith honors

shelter and support of the decrepit and helpless of either sex, who are collected there to the number of five hundred. The more modern quarter was erected from a bequest by Soldini; and eternal provision is also made by his will for ninety of the inmates. The Secretary of the Casa went through all the wards and infirmaries with me, and everywhere I saw cleanliness and comfort (and such content as is possible to sickness and old age), without surprise; for I had before seen the Civil Hospital of Venice, and knew something of the perfection of Venetian charities.

At last we came to the wardrobe, where the clothes of the pensioners are made and kept. Here we were attended by a little, slender, pallid young nun, who exhibited the dresses with a simple pride altogether pathetic. She was a woman still, poor thing, though a nun, and she could not help loving new clothes. They called her Madre, who would never be it except in name and motherly tenderness. When we had seen all, she stood a moment before us, and as one of the coarse woollen lappets of her cape had hidden it she drew out a heavy crucifix of gold, and placed it in sight, with a heavenly little ostentation, over her heart. Sweet and beautiful vanity! An angel could have done it without harm, but she blushed repentance, and glided away with downcast eyes. Poor little mother!

the superstition which has succeeded it. To see this superstition in all its proper grossness and deformity you must go into some of the Renaissance churches, — fit tabernacles for that droning and mumming spirit which has deprived all young and generous men in Italy of religion; which has made the priests a bitter jest and by-word; which has rendered the population ignorant, vicious, and hopeless; which gives its friendship to tyranny and its hatred to freedom; which destroys the life of the Church that it may sustain the power of the Pope. The idols of this superstition are the foolish and hideous dolls which people bow to in most of the Venetian temples, and of which the most abominable is in the church of the Carmelites. It represents the Madonna with the Child, elevated breast-high to the worshippers. She is crowned with tinsel and garlanded with paper flowers; she has a blue ribbon about her tightly corseted waist; and she wears an immense spreading hoop. On her painted, silly face of wood, with its staring eyes shadowed by a wig, is figured a pert smile, and people come constantly and kiss the cross that hangs by a chain from her girdle, and utter their prayers to her; while

the column near which she sits is hung over with pictures celebrating the miracles she has performed.

These votive pictures, indeed, are to be seen on most altars of the Virgin, and are no less interesting as works of art than as expressions of hopeless superstition. That Virgin, who, in all her portraits, is dressed in a churn-shaped gown, and who holds a Child similarly habited, is the Madonna most efficacious in cases of dreadful accident and hopeless sickness, if we may trust the pictures which represent her interference. You behold a carriage overturned and dragged along the ground by frantic horses, and the fashionably dressed lady and gentleman in the carriage about to be dashed into millions of pieces, when the havoc is instantly arrested by this Madonna, who breaks the clouds, leaving them with jagged and shattered edges, like broken panes of glass, and visibly holds back the fashionable lady and gentleman from destruction. It is the fashionable lady and gentleman who have thus recorded their obligation; and it is the mother, doubtless, of the little boy miraculously preserved from death in his fall from the second-floor balcony, who has gratefully

caused the miracle to be painted and hung at the Madonna's shrine. Now and then you also find offerings of corn and fruits before her altar, in acknowledgment of good crops which the Madonna has made to grow; and again you find rows of silver hearts, typical of the sinful hearts which her intercession has caused to be purged. The greatest number of these, at any one shrine, is to be seen in the church of San Nicolò dei Tolentini, where I should think there were three hundred.

Whatever may be the popularity of the Madonna della Salute in pestilent times, I do not take it to be very great when the health of the city is good, if I may judge from the spareness of the worshippers in the church of her name: it is true that on the annual holiday commemorative of her interposition to save Venice from the plague there is an immense concourse of people there; but at other times I found the masses and vespers slenderly attended, and I did not observe a great number of votive offerings in the temple, — though the great silver lamp placed there by the city, in memory of the Madonna's goodness during the visitation of the cholera in 1849, may be counted,

perhaps, as representative of much collective gratitude. It is a cold, superb church, lording it over the noblest breadth of the Grand Canal; and I do not know what it is saves it from being as hateful to the eye as other temples of the Renaissance architecture. But it has certainly a fine effect, with its twin bell-towers and single massive dome, its majestic breadth of steps rising from the water's edge, and the many-statued sculpture of its façade. Strangers go there to see the splendor of its high altar (where the melodramatic Madonna, as the centre of a marble group, responds to the prayer of the operatic Venezia, and drives away the haggard, theatrical Pest), and the excellent Titians and the grand Tintoretto in the sacristy.

The Salute is one of the great show-churches, like that of San Giovanni e Paolo, which the common poverty of imagination has decided to call the Venetian Westminster Abbey, because it contains many famous tombs and monuments. But there is only one Westminster Abbey; and I am so far a believer in the perfectibility of our species as to suppose that vergers are nowhere possible but in England. There would

be nothing to say, after Mr. Ruskin, in praise or blame of the great monuments in San Giovanni e Paolo, even if I cared to discuss them; I only wonder that, in speaking of the bad art which produced the tomb of the Venieri, he failed to mention the successful approach to its depraved feeling, made by the single figure sitting on the base of a slender shaft, at the side of the first altar on the right of the main entrance. I suppose this figure typifies Grief, but it really represents a drunken woman, whose drapery has fallen, as if in some vile debauch, to her waist, and who broods, with a horrible, heavy stupor and chopfallen vacancy, on something which she supports with her left hand upon her knee. It is a round of marble, and if you have the daring to peer under the arm of the debauchee, and look at it as she does, you find that it contains the bas-relief of a skull in bronze. Nothing more ghastly and abominable than the whole thing can be conceived, and it seemed to me the fit type of the abandoned Venice which produced it; for one even less Ruskinian than I might have fancied that in the sculptured countenance could be seen the dismay of the pleasure-wasted harlot of the sea

when, from time to time, death confronted her amid her revels.

People go into the Chapel of the Rosary here to see the painting of Titian representing the Death of Peter Martyr. Behind it stands a painting of equal size by John Bellini, — the Madonna, Child, and Saints, of course, — and it is curious to study in the two pictures those points in which Titian excelled and fell short of his master. The treatment of the sky in the landscape is singularly alike in both, but where the greater painter has gained in breadth and freedom he has lost in that indefinable charm which belonged chiefly to Bellini, and only to that brief age of transition of which his genius was the fairest flower and ripest fruit. I have looked again and again at nearly every painting of note in Venice, having a foolish shame to miss a single one, and having also a better wish to learn something of the beautiful from them; but at last I must say that, while I wondered at the greatness of some, and tried to wonder at the greatness of others, the only paintings which gave me genuine and hearty pleasure were those of Bellini, Carpaccio, and a few others of that school and time.

Every day we used to pass through the court of the old Augustinian convent adjoining the church of San Stefano. It is a long time since the monks were driven out of their snug hold; and the convent is now the headquarters of the Austrian engineer corps, and the colonnade surrounding the court is become a public thoroughfare. On one wall of this court are remains — very shadowy remains indeed — of frescos painted by Pordenone at the period of his fiercest rivalry with Titian; and it is said that Pordenone, while he wrought upon the scenes of scriptural story here represented, wore his sword and buckler, in readiness to repel an attack which he feared from his competitor. The story is very vague, and I hunted it down in divers authorities only to find it grow more and more intangible and uncertain. But it gave a singular relish to our daily walk through the old cloister, and I added, for my own pleasure (and chiefly out of my own fancy, I am afraid, for I can nowhere localize the fable on which I built), that the rivalry between the painters was partly a love-jealousy, and that the disputed object of their passion was that fair Violante, daughter of the elder Palma, who is to

be seen in so many pictures painted by her father and by her lover, Titian. No doubt there are readers who will care less for this idleness of mine than for the fact that the hard-headed German monk, Martin Luther, once said mass in the adjoining church of San Stefano, and lodged in the convent, on his way to Rome. The unhappy Francesco Carrara, last Lord of Padua, is buried in this church; but Venetians are chiefly interested there now by the homilies of those fervent preacher-monks, who deliver powerful sermons during Lent. The monks are gifted men, with a most earnest and graceful eloquence, and they attract immense audiences, like popular and eccentric ministers among ourselves. It is a fashion to hear them, and although the atmosphere of the churches in the season of Lent is raw, damp, and most uncomfortable, the Venetians then throng the churches where they preach. After Lent the sermons and church-going cease, and the sanctuaries are once more abandoned to the possession of the priests, droning from the altars to the scattered kneelers on the floor, — the foul old women and the young girls of the poor, the old-fashioned old gentlemen and devout

ladies of the better class, and that singular race of poverty-stricken old men proper to Italian churches, who, having dabbled themselves with holy water, wander forlornly and aimlessly about, and seem to consort with the foreigners looking at the objects of interest. Lounging young fellows of low degree appear with their caps in their hands, long enough to tap themselves upon the breast and nod recognition to the high altar; and lounging young fellows of high degree step in to glance at the faces of the pretty girls, and then vanish. The droning ends, presently, and the devotees disappear, the last to go being that thin old woman, kneeling before a shrine, with a grease-gray shawl falling from her head to the ground. The sacristan, in his perennial enthusiasm about the great picture of the church, almost treads upon her as he brings the strangers to see it, and she gets meekly up and begs of them in a whispering whimper. The sacristan gradually expels her with the visitors, and at one o'clock locks the door and goes home.

By chance I have got a fine effect in churches at the five o'clock mass in the morning, when the worshippers are nearly all

peasants who have come to market, and who are pretty sure, each one, to have a bundle or basket. At this hour the sacristan is heavy with sleep; he dodges uncertainly at the tapers as he lights and extinguishes them; and his manner to the congregation, as he passes through it to the altar, is altogether rasped and nervous. I think it is best to be one's self a little sleepy, — when the barefooted friar at the altar (if it is in the church of the Scalzi, say) has a habit of getting several centuries back from you, and of saying mass to the patrician ghosts from the tombs under your feet; and there is nothing at all impossible in the Renaissance angels and cherubs in marble, floating and fatly tumbling about on the broken arches of the altars.

I have sometimes been puzzled in Venice to know why churches should keep cats, church-mice being proverbially so poor, and so little capable of sustaining a cat in good condition; yet I have repeatedly found sleek and portly cats in the churches, where they seem to be on terms of perfect understanding with the priests, and to have no quarrel even with the little boys who assist at mass. There is, for instance, a cat in the sacristy of the

Frari, which I have often seen in familiar association with the ecclesiastics there, when they came into his room to robe or disrobe or warm their hands, numb with supplication, at the great brazier in the middle of the floor. I do not think this cat has the slightest interest in the lovely Madonna of Bellini which hangs in the sacristy; but I suspect him of dreadful knowledge concerning the tombs in the church. I have no doubt he has passed through the open door of Canova's monument, and that he sees some coherence and meaning in Titian's; he has been all over the great mausoleum of the Doge Pesaro, and he knows whether the griffins descend from their perches at the midnight hour to bite the naked knees of the ragged black caryatides. This profound and awful animal I take to be a blood relation of the cat in the church of San Giovanni e Paolo, who sleeps like a Christian during divine service, and loves a certain glorious bed on the top of a bench, where the sun strikes upon him through the great painted window, and dapples his tawny coat with lovely purples and crimsons.

The church cats are apparently the friends of the sacristans, with whom their amity is

maintained probably by entire cession of the spoils of visitors. In these, therefore, they seldom take any interest, merely opening a lazy eye now and then to wink at the sacristans as they drag the deluded strangers from altar to altar, with intense enjoyment of the absurdity and a wicked satisfaction in the incredible stories rehearsed. I fancy, being Italian cats, they feel something like a national antipathy toward those troops of German tourists, who always seek the Sehenswürdigkeiten in companies of ten or twenty, — the men wearing their beards, and the women their hoops and hats, to look as much like English people as possible; while their valet marshals them forward with a stream of guttural information, unbroken by a single punctuation point. These wise cats know the real English by their Murrays; and I think they make a shrewd guess at the nationality of us Americans by the speed with which we pass from one thing to another, and by our national ignorance of all languages but English. They must also hear us vaunt the superiority of our own land in unpleasant comparisons, and I do not think they believe us, or like us, for our boastings. I am sure they would say to us,

if they could, "*Quando finirà mai quella guerra? Che sangue! che orrore!*"[1] The French tourist they distinguish by his evident skepticism concerning his own wisdom in quitting Paris for the present purpose; and the travelling Italian by his attention to his badly dressed, handsome wife, with whom he is now making his wedding trip.

I have found churches undergoing repairs (as most of them always are in Venice) rather interesting. Under these circumstances, the sacristan is obliged to take you into all sorts of secret places and odd corners, to show you the objects of interest; and you may often get glimpses of pictures which, if not removed from their proper places, it would be impossible to see. The carpenters and masons work most deliberately, as if in a place so set against progress that speedy workmanship would be a kind of impiety. Besides the mechanics, there are always idle priests standing about, and vagabond boys clambering over the scaffolding. In San Giovanni e Paolo I remember we one day saw a small boy appear through

[1] "When will this war ever be ended? What blood! what horror!" I have often heard the question and the comment from many Italians who were not cats.

an opening in the roof, and descend by means of some hundred feet of dangling rope. The spectacle, which made us ache with fear, delighted his companions so much that their applause was scarcely subdued by the sacred character of the place. As soon as he reached the ground in safety, a gentle, good-natured-looking priest took him by the arm and cuffed his ears. It was a scene for a painter.

XII

SOME ISLANDS OF THE LAGOONS

NOTHING can be fairer to the eye than these "summer isles of Eden" lying all about Venice, far and near. The water forever trembles and changes, with every change of light, from one rainbow glory to another, as with the restless hues of an opal; and even when the splendid tides recede and go down with the sea, they leave a heritage of beauty to the empurpled mud of the shallows, all strewn with green, dishevelled seaweed. The lagoons have almost as wide a bound as your vision. On the east and west you can see their borders of sea-shore and main-land; but looking north and south, there seems no end to the charm of their vast, smooth, all but melancholy expanses. Beyond their southern limit rise the blue Euganean Hills, where Petrarch died; on the north, loom the Alps, white with snow. Dotting the stretches of lagoon in every direction lie the islands, — now piles of airy

architecture that the water seems to float under and bear upon its breast, now

"Sunny spots of greenery,"

with the bell-towers of demolished cloisters shadowily showing above their trees; for in the days of the Republic nearly every one of the islands had its monastery and its church. At present the greater number have been fortified by the Austrians, whose sentinel paces the once peaceful shores, and challenges all passers with his sharp "*Halt! Wer da!*" and warns them not to approach too closely. Other islands have been devoted to different utilitarian purposes, and few are able to keep their distant promises of loveliness. One of the more faithful is the island of San Clemente, on which the old convent church is yet standing, empty and forlorn within, but without all draped in glossy ivy. After I had learned to row in the gondolier fashion, I voyaged much in the lagoon with my boat, and often stopped at this church. It has a curious feature in the chapel of the Madonna di Loreto, which is built in the middle of the nave, faced with marble, roofed, and isolated from the walls of the main edifice on all sides. On the back of this there is a bas-relief in bronze,

representing the Nativity, — a work much in the spirit of the bas-reliefs in San Giovanni e Paolo; and one of the chapels has an exquisite little altar, with gleaming columns of porphyry. There has been no service in the church for many years; and this altar had a strangely pathetic effect, won from the black four-cornered cap of a priest that lay before it, like an offering. I wondered who the priest was that wore it, and why he had left it there, as if he had fled away in haste. I might have thought it looked like the signal of the abdication of a system; the gondolier who was with me took it up and reviled it as representative of *birbanti matricolati*, who fed upon the poor, and in whose expulsion from that island he rejoiced. But he had little reason to do so, since the last use of the place was for the imprisonment of refractory ecclesiastics. Some of the tombs of the Morosini are in San Clemente, — villainous monuments, with bronze Deaths popping out of apertures, and holding marble scrolls inscribed with undying deeds. Indeed, nearly all the decorations of the poor old church are horrible, and there is one statue in it, meant for an angel, with absolutely the most lascivious face I ever saw in marble.

The islands near Venice are all small, except the Giudecca (which is properly a part of the city), the Lido, and Murano. The Giudecca, from being anciently the bounds in which certain factious nobles were confined, was later laid out in pleasure-gardens and built up with summer palaces. The gardens still remain to some extent; but they are now chiefly turned to practical account in raising vegetables and fruits for the Venetian market, and the palaces have been converted into warehouses and factories. This island produces a variety of beggar, the most truculent and tenacious in all Venice, and it has a convent of lazy Capuchin friars, who are likewise beggars. To them belongs the church of the Redentore, which only the Madonnas of Bellini in the sacristy make worthy to be seen, — though the island is hardly less famed for this church than for the difficult etymology of its name.

At the eastern extremity of the Giudecca lies the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, with Palladio's church of that name. There are some great Tintorettos in the church, and I like the beautiful wood-carvings in the choir. The island has a sad interest from the political prison into which part of the old

convent has been perverted; and the next island eastward is the scarcely sadder abode of the mad. Then comes the fair and happy seat of Armenian learning and piety, San Lazzaro, and then the Lido.

The Lido is the sea-shore, and thither in more cheerful days the Venetians used to resort in great numbers on certain holidays, called the Mondays of the Lido, to enjoy the sea-breeze and the country scenery, and to lunch upon the flat tombs of the Hebrews, buried there in exile from the consecrated Christian ground. On a summer's day there the sun glares down upon the sand and flat gravestones, and it seems the most desolate place where one's bones might be laid. The Protestants were once also interred on the Lido, but now they rest (apart from the Catholics, however) in the cemetery of San Michele.

The island is long and narrow: it stretches between the lagoons and the sea, with a village at either end, and with bath-houses on the beach, which is everywhere faced with forts. There are some poor little trees there, and grass, — things which we were thrice a week grateful for, when we went thither to bathe. I do not know whether it will give

the place further interest to say that it was among the tombs of the Hebrews Cooper's ingenious Bravo had the incredible good luck to hide himself from the *sbirri* of the Republic; or to relate that it was the habit of Lord Byron to gallop up and down the Lido in search of that conspicuous solitude of which the sincere bard was fond.

One day of the first summer I spent in Venice (three years of Venetian life afterward removed it back into times of the remotest antiquity), a friend and I had the now incredible enterprise to walk from one end of the Lido to the other, — from the port of San Nicolò (through which the Bucintoro passed when the Doges went to espouse the Adriatic) to the port of Malamocco, at the southern extremity.

We began with that delicious bath which you may have in the Adriatic, where the light surf breaks with a pensive cadence on the soft sand, all strewn with brilliant shells. The Adriatic is the bluest water I have ever seen; and it is an ineffable, lazy delight to lie and watch the fishing sails of purple and yellow dotting its surface, and the greater ships dipping down its utmost rim. It was particularly good to do this after coming out

of the water; but our American blood could not brook much repose, and we got up presently, and started on our walk to the little village of Malamocco, some three miles away. The double-headed eagle keeps watch and ward from a continuous line of forts along the shore, and the white-coated sentinels never cease to pace the bastions, night or day. Their vision of the sea must not be interrupted by even so much as the form of a stray passer; and as we went by the forts, we had to descend from the sea-wall, and walk under it, until we got beyond the sentry's beat. The crimson poppies grow everywhere on this sandy little isle, and they fringe the edges of the bastions with their bloom, as if the "blood-red blossoms of war" had there sprung from the seeds of battle sown in old forgotten fights. But otherwise the forts were not very engaging in appearance. A sentry-box of yellow and black, a sentry, a row of seaward frowning cannon, — there was not much in all this to interest us; and so we walked idly along, and looked either to the city rising from the lagoons on one hand, or the ships going down the sea on the other. In the fields, along the road, were vines and Indian corn; but instead of

those effigies of humanity, doubly fearful from their wide unlikeness to anything human, which we contrive to scare away the birds, the devout peasant-folks had here displayed on poles the instruments of the Passion of the Lord, — the hammer, the cords, the nails, — which at once protected and blessed the fields. But I doubt if even these would save them from the New World pigs, and certainly the fences here would not turn pork, for they are made of a matting of reeds, woven together, and feebly secured to tremulous posts. The fields were well cultivated, and the vines and garden vegetables looked flourishing; but the corn was spindling, and had, I thought, a homesick look, as if it dreamed vainly of wide ancestral bottom-lands, on the mighty streams that run through the heart of the Great West. The Italians call our corn *gran turco;* but I knew that it was for the West that it yearned, and not for the East.

No doubt there were once finer dwellings than the peasants' houses which are now the only habitations on the Lido; and I suspect that a genteel villa must formerly have stood near the farm-gate, which we found surmounted by broken statues of Venus and

Diana. The poor goddesses were both headless, and some cruel fortune had struck off their hands, and they looked strangely forlorn in the swaggering attitudes of the absurd period of art to which they belonged: they extended their mutilated arms toward the sea for pity, but it regarded them not; and we passed before them scoffing at their bad taste, for we were hungry, and it was yet some distance to Malamocco.

This dirty little village was the capital of the Venetian islands before King Pepin and his Franks burned it, and the shifting sands of empire gathered solidly about the Rialto in Venice. It is a thousand years since that time, and Malamocco has long been given over to fishermen's families and the soldiers of the forts. We found the latter lounging about the unwholesome streets; and the former seated at their thresholds, engaged in those pursuits of the chase which the use of a fine-tooth comb would undignify to mere slaughter.

There is a church at Malamocco, but it was closed, and we could not find the sacristan; so we went to the little restaurant, as the next best place, and demanded something to eat. What had the padrone? He

answered pretty much to the same effect as the innkeeper in Don Quixote, who told his guests that they could have anything that walked on the earth, or swam in the sea, or flew in the air. We would take, then, some fish, or a bit of veal, or some mutton chops. The padrone sweetly shrugged the shoulders of apology. There was nothing of all this, but what would we say to some liver or gizzards of chickens, fried upon the instant and ready the next breath? No, we did not want them; so we compromised on some ham fried in a batter of eggs, and reeking with its own fatness. The truth is, it was a very bad little lunch we made, and nothing redeemed it but the amiability of the smiling padrone and the bustling padrona, who served us as kings and princes. It was a clean hostelry, though, and that was a merit in Malamocco, of which the chief modern virtue is that it cannot hold you long. No doubt it was more interesting in other times. In the days when the Venetians chose it for their capital, it was a walled town, and fortified with towers. It has been more than once inundated by the sea, and it might again be washed out with advantage.

In the spring, two years after my visit to

Malamocco, we people in Casa Falier made a long-intended expedition to the island of Torcello, which is perhaps the most interesting of the islands of the lagoons. We had talked of it all winter, and had acquired enough property there to put up some light Spanish castles on the desolate site of the ancient city that so many years ago sickened of the swamp air and died. A Count from Torcello is the title which Venetian *persiflage* gives to improbable noblemen; and thus even the pride of the dead Republic of Torcello has passed into matter of scornful jest, as that of the dead Republic of Venice may likewise in its day.

When we leave the *riva* of Casa Falier, we pass down the Grand Canal, cross the Basin of St. Mark, and enter one of the narrow canals that intersect the Riva degli Schiavoni, whence we wind and deviate southwestward till we emerge near the church of San Giovanni e Paolo, on the Fondamenta Nuove. On our way we notice that a tree, hanging over the water from a little garden, is in full leaf, and at Murano we see the tender bloom of peaches and the drifted blossom of cherry-trees.

As we go by the Cemetery of San Michele,

Piero, the gondolier, and Giovanna improve us with a little solemn pleasantry.

"It is a small place," says Piero, "but there is room enough for all Venice in it."

"It is true," assents Giovanna, "and here we poor folks become landholders at last."

At Murano we stop a moment to look at the old Duomo, and to enjoy its quaint mosaics within, and the fine and graceful spirit of the *apsis* without. It is very old, this architecture; but the eternal youth of the beautiful belongs to it, and there is scarce a stone fallen from it that I would replace.

The manufacture of glass at Murano, of which the origin is so remote, may be said to form the only branch of industry which still flourishes in the lagoons. Muranese beads are exported to all quarters in vast quantities, and the process of making them is one of the things that strangers feel they must see when visiting Venice. The famous mirrors are no longer made, and the glass has deteriorated in quality, as well as in the beauty of the thousand curious forms it took. The test of the old glass, which is now imitated a great deal, is its extreme lightness. I suppose the charming notion

that glass was once wrought at Murano of such fineness that it burst into fragments if poison were poured into it must be fabulous. And yet it would have been an excellent thing in the good old toxicological days of Italy; and people of noble family would have found a sensitive goblet of this sort as sovereign against the arts of venomers as an exclusive diet of boiled eggs.

The city of Murano has dwindled from thirty to five thousand in population. It is intersected by a system of canals like Venice, and has a Grand Canal of its own, of as stately breadth as that of the capital. The finer houses are built on this canal; but the beautiful palaces, once occupied in *villeggiatura* by the noble Venetians, are now inhabited by herds of poor, or converted into glass-works. The famous Cardinal Bembo and other *literati* made the island their retreat, and beautified it with gardens and fountains. Casa Priuli in that day was, according to Venetian ideas, "a terrestrial Paradise," and a proper haunt of "nymphs and demi-gods." But the wealth, the learning, and the elegance of former times, which planted "groves of Academe" at Murano, have passed away, and the fair pleasure-gar-

dens are now weed-grown wastes, or turned into honest cabbage and potato patches. It is a poor, dreary little town, with an inexplicable charm in its decay. The city arms are still displayed upon the public buildings (for Murano was ruled, independently of Venice, by its own council); and the heraldic cock, with a snake in its beak, has yet a lusty and haughty air amid the ruin of the place.

The way in which the spring made itself felt upon the lagoon was full of curious delight. It was not so early in the season that we should know the spring by the first raw warmth in the air, and there was as yet no assurance of her presence in the growth — later so luxuriant — of the coarse grasses of the shallows. But somehow the spring was there, giving us new life with every breath. There were fewer gulls than usual, and those we saw sailed far overhead, debating departure. There was deeper languor in the laziness of the soldiers of finance, as they lounged and slept upon their floating custom-houses in every channel of the lagoons; and the hollow voices of the boatmen, yelling to each other, as their wont is, had an uncommon tendency to diffuse themselves in echo. Over all, the heavens had

put on their summer blue, in promise of that delicious weather which in the lagoons lasts half the year, and which makes every other climate seem niggard of sunshine and azure skies. I know we have beautiful days at home, — days of which the sumptuous splendor used to take my memory with unspeakable longing and regret even in Italy, — but we do not have, week after week, month after month, that

"Blue, unclouded weather,"

which, at Venice, contents all your senses, and makes you exult to be alive with the inarticulate gladness of children, or of the swallows that there all day wheel and dart through the air, and shriek out a delight too intense and precipitate for song.

The island of Torcello is some five miles away from Venice, in the northern lagoon. The city was founded far back in the troubled morning of Christian civilization, by refugees from barbarian invasion, and built with stones quarried from the ruins of old Altinum, over which Attila had passed desolating. During the first ages of its existence Torcello enjoyed the doubtful advantage of protection from the Greek emperors, but fell afterward under the domination of

Venice. In the thirteenth century the *débris* of the river that emptied into the lagoon there began to choke up the wholesome salt canals, and to poison the air with swampy malaria; and in the seventeenth century the city had so dwindled that the Venetian *podestà* removed his residence from the depopulated island to Burano, — though the bishopric established immediately after the settlement of the refugees at Torcello continued there till 1814, to the satisfaction, no doubt, of the frogs and mosquitoes that had long inherited the former citizens.

I confess that I know little more of the history of Torcello than I found in my guide-book. There I read that the city had once stately civic and religious edifices, and that in the tenth century the Emperor Porphorygenitus called it "*magnum emporium Torcellanorum.*" The much-restored cathedral of the seventh century, a little church, a building supposed to have been the public palace, and other edifices so ruinous and so old that their exact use in other days is not now known, are all that remain of the *magnum emporium*, except some lines of mouldering wall that wander along the canals and through pastures and vineyards, in the last

imbecile stages of dilapidation and decay. There is a lofty bell-tower, also, from which, no doubt, the Torcellani used to descry afar off the devouring hordes of the barbarians on the main-land, and prepare for defence. As their city was never actually invaded, I am at a loss to account for the so-called Throne of Attila, which stands in the grass-grown piazza before the cathedral; and I fear that it may really have been after all only the seat which the ancient Tribunes of Torcello occupied on public occasions. It is a stone arm-chair, of a rude stateliness, and though I questioned its authenticity I went and sat down in it a little while, to give myself the benefit of a doubt in case Attila had really pressed the same seat.

As soon as our gondola touched the grassy shores at Torcello, Giovanna's children, Beppi and Nina, whom we had brought with us to give a first experience of trees and flowers and mother earth, leaped from the boat and took possession of land and water. By a curious fatality the little girl, who was bred safely amid the hundred canals of Venice, signalized her absence from their perils by presently falling into the only canal in Torcello, whence she was taken dripping,

to be confined at a farm-house during the rest of our stay. The children were wild with pleasure, being absolutely new to the country, and ran over the island, plucking bouquets of weeds and flowers by armsful. A rake, borne afield upon the shoulder of a peasant, afterwhile fascinated the Venetian Beppi, and drew him away to study its strange and wonderful uses.

The simple inhabitants of Torcello came forth with gifts, or rather bargains, of flowers, to meet their discoverers, and in a little while exhausted our soldi. They also attended us in full force when we sat down to lunch, — the old, the young men and maidens, and the little children, all alike sallow, tattered, and dirty. Under these circumstances, a sense of the idyllic and the patriarchal gave zest to our collation, and moved us to bestow, in a splendid manner, fragments of the feast among the poor Torcellani. Knowing the abstemiousness of Italians everywhere, and seeing the hungry fashion in which the islanders clutched our gifts and devoured them, it was our doubt whether any one of them had ever experienced perfect repletion. I inclined to think that a chronic famine gnawed their entrails,

and that they never filled their bellies but with draughts of the east wind disdained of Job. The smaller among them even scrambled with the dog for the bones until a little girl was bitten, when a terrific tumult arose, and the dog was driven home by the whole multitude. The children presently returned. They all had that gift of beauty which Nature seldom denies to the children of their race; but being, as I said, so dirty, their beauty shone forth chiefly from their large, soft eyes. They had a very graceful, bashful archness of manner, and they insinuated beggary so winningly that it would have been impossible for hungry people to deny them. As for us, having lunched, we gave them everything that remained, and went off to feast our enthusiasm for art and antiquity in the cathedral.

Of course, I have not the least intention of describing it. I remember best among its wonders the bearing of certain impenitents in one of the mosaics on the walls, whom the earnest early artist had meant to represent as suffering in the flames of torment. I think, however, I have never seen complacence equal to that of these sinners, unless it was in the countenances of the

seven fat kine, which, as represented in the vestibule of St. Mark's, wear an air of the sleepiest and laziest enjoyment, while the seven lean kine, having just come up from the river, devour steaks from their bleeding haunches. There are other mosaics in the Torcello cathedral, especially those in the *apsis* and in one of the side chapels, which are in a beautiful spirit of art, and form the widest possible contrast to the eighteenth-century high altar, with its insane and ribald angels flying off at the sides, and poising themselves in the rope-dancing attitudes favored by statues of heavenly persons in the decline of the Renaissance. The choir is peculiarly built, in the form of a half-circle, with seats rising one above another, as in an amphitheatre, and a flight of steps ascending to the bishop's seat above all, — after the manner of the earliest Christian churches. The partition parapet before the high altar is of almost transparent marble, delicately and quaintly sculptured with peacocks and lions, as the Byzantines loved to carve them; and the capitals of the columns dividing the naves are of infinite richness. Part of the marble pulpit has a curious bas-relief, said to be representative of the wor-

ship of Mercury; and indeed the Torcellani owe much of the beauty of their Duomo to unrequited antiquity. (They came to be robbed in their turn: for the opulence of their churches was so great that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the severest penalties had to be enacted against those who stole from them. No one will be surprised to learn that the clergy themselves participated in these spoliations; but I believe no ecclesiastic was ever lashed in the piazza, or deprived of an eye or a hand, for his offence.) The Duomo has the peculiar Catholic interest and the horrible fascination of a dead saint's mortal part in a glass case.

An arcade runs along the façade of the cathedral, and around the side and front of the adjoining church of Santa Fosca, which is likewise very old. But we found nothing in it but a dusty, cadaverous stench, and so we came away and ascended the campanile. From the top of this you have a view of the lagoon in all its iridescent hues, and of the heaven-blue sea. Here, looking toward the main-land, I would have been glad to experience the feelings of the Torcellani of old, as they descried the smoking advance of Huns

or Vandals. But the finer emotions are like gifted children, and are seldom equal to occasions. I am ashamed to say that mine got no further than Castle Bluebeard, with Lady Bluebeard's sister looking out for her brothers, and tearfully responding to Lady B.'s repeated and agonized entreaty, "O sister, do you see them yet?"

The old woman who had opened the door of the campanile was surprised into hospitality by the sum of money we gave her, and took us through her house (which was certainly very neat and clean) into her garden, where she explained the nature of many familiar trees and shrubs to us poor Venetians.

We went back home over the twilight lagoon, and Giovanna expressed the general feeling when she said: "*Torsello xe beo — no si pol negar — la campagna xe bea; ma benedetta la mia Venezia!*" (The country is beautiful — it can't be denied — Torcello is beautiful; but blessed be my Venice!)

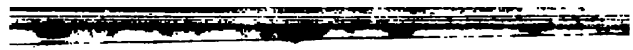
The panorama of the southern lagoon is best seen in a voyage to Chioggia, or Ciozza, the quaint and historic little city that lies twenty miles away from Venice, at one of the ports of the harbor. The Giant Seawall, built there by the Republic in her de-

cline, is a work of Roman grandeur which impresses you more deeply than any other monument of the past with a sense of her former industrial and commercial greatness. Strips of village border the narrow Littorale all the way to Chioggia, and on the right lie the islands of the lagoon. Chioggia itself is hardly more than a village, — a Venice in miniature, like Murano, with canals and boats and bridges. But here the character of life is more amphibious than in brine-bound Venice; and though there is no horse to be seen in the central streets of Chioggia, peasants' teams penetrate her borders by means of a long bridge from the main-land.

Of course Chioggia has passed through the customary vicissitudes of Italian towns, and has been depopulated at divers times by pestilence, famine, and war. It suffered cruelly in the war with the Genoese in 1380, when it was taken by those enemies of St. Mark; and its people were so wasted by the struggle that the Venetians, on regaining it, were obliged to invite immigration to repopulate its emptiness. I do not know how great comfort the Chiozzotti of that unhappy day took in the fact that some of the earliest experiments with cannon were made

in the contest that destroyed them, but I can hardly offer them less tribute than to mention it here. At present the place is peopled almost entirely by sailors and fishermen, whose wives are more famous for their beauty than their amiability. Goldoni's Baruffe Chiozzotte is an amusing and vivid picture of the daily battles which the high-spirited ladies of the city fought in the dramatist's [1] time, and which are said to be of frequent occurrence at this day. The Chiozzotte are the only women of this part of Italy who still preserve a semblance of national costume; and this remnant of more picturesque times consists merely of a skirt of white, which, being open in front, is drawn from the waist over the head and gathered in the hand under the chin, giving to the flashing black eyes and swarthy features of the youthful wearer a look of very dangerous slyness and cunning. The dialect of the Chiozzotti is said to be that of the early Venetians, with an admixture of Greek, and it is infinitely more sweet and musical than the dialect now spoken in Venice.

[1] Goldoni's family went from Venice to Chioggia when the dramatist was very young. The descriptions of his life there form some of the most interesting chapters of his Memoirs.



"Whether derived," says the author of the Fiore di Venezia, alluding to the speech of these peculiar people, "from those who first settled these shores, or resulting from other physical and moral causes, it is certain that the tone of the voice is here more varied and powerful: the mouth is thrown wide open in speaking; a passion, a lament, mingles with laughter itself, and there is a continual *ritornello* of words previously spoken. But this speech is full of energy; whoever would study brief and strong modes of expression should come here."

Chioggia was once the residence of noble and distinguished persons, among whom was the painter Rosalba Carrera, famed throughout Europe for her crayon miniatures; and the place produced, in the sixteenth century, the great maestro Giuseppe Zarlino, "who passes," says Cantù, "for the restorer of modern music," and "whose Orfeo heralded the invention of the musical drama." This composer claimed for his birthplace the doubtful honor of the institution of the order of the Capuchins, which he declared to have been founded by Fra Paolo (Giovanni Sambi) of Chioggia. There is not much now to see in poor little Chioggia except its

common people, who, after a few minutes' contemplation, can hardly interest any one but the artist. There are no dwellings in the town which approach palatial grandeur, and nothing in the Renaissance churches to claim attention, unless it be an attributive Bellini in one of them. Yet if you have the courage to climb the bell-tower of the cathedral, you get from its summit the loveliest imaginable view of many-purpled lagoon and silver-flashing sea; and if you are sufficiently acquainted with Italy and Italians to observe a curious fact, and care to study the subject, you may note the great difference between the inhabitants of Chioggia and those of Palestrina, — an island divided from Chioggia by a half mile of lagoon, and by quite different costume, type of face, and accent.

Just between Chioggia and the sea lies the lazy town of Sottomarina, and I should say that the population of Sottomarina chiefly spent its time in lounging up and down the Sea-wall; while that of Chioggia, when not professionally engaged with the net, gave its leisure to playing *mora*[1] in the

[1] *Mora* is the game which the Italians play with their fingers, one throwing out two, three, or four fingers, as the case

shade, or pitilessly pursuing strangers, and offering them boats. For my own part, I refused the subtlest advances of this kind which were made me in Chiozzotto, but fell a helpless prey to a boatman who addressed me in some words of wonderful English, and then rowed me to the Sea-wall at about thrice the usual fare.

These primitive people are bent, in their out-of-the-world, remote way, upon fleecing the passing stranger quite as earnestly as other Italians, and they naively improve every occasion for plunder. As we passed up the shady side of their wide street, we came upon a plump little blonde boy, lying asleep on the stones, with his head upon his arm; and as no one was near, the artist of our party stopped to sketch the sleeper. Atmospheric knowledge of the fact spread rapidly, and in a few minutes we were the centre of a general assembly of the people of Chioggia, who discussed us and the artist's treatment of her subject in open congress. They handed round the airy chaff, as usual, but were very orderly and respect-

may be, and calling the number at the same instant. If (so I understood the game) the player mistakes the number of fingers he throws out, he loses; if he hits the number with both voice and fingers, he wins. It is played with tempestuous interest, and is altogether fiendish in appearance.

ful, nevertheless, — one father of the place quelling every tendency to tumult by kicking his next neighbor, who passed on the penalty, till, by this simple and ingenious process, the guilty cause of the trouble was infallibly reached and kicked at last. I placed a number of soldi in the boy's hand, to the visible sensation of the crowd, and then we moved away and left him, heading, as we went, a procession of Chiozzotti, who could not make up their minds to relinquish us till we took refuge in a church. When we came out the procession had disappeared, but all round the church door, and picturesquely scattered upon the pavement in every direction, lay boys asleep, with their heads upon their arms. As we passed, laughing, through the midst of these slumberers, they rose and followed us with cries of "*Mi tiri zu! Mi tiri zu!*" (Take me down! Take me down!) They ran ahead, and fell asleep again in our path, and round every corner we came upon a sleeping boy; and, indeed, we never got out of that atmosphere of slumber till we returned to the steamer for Venice, when Chioggia shook off her drowsy stupor, and began to tempt us to throw soldi into the water, to be dived for by her awakened children.

XIII

THE ARMENIANS

AMONG the pleasantest friends we made in Venice were the monks of the Armenian Convent, whose cloistral buildings rise from the glassy lagoon, upon the south of the city, near a mile away. This bulk

"Of mellow brick-work on an isle of bowers"

is walled in with solid masonry from the sea, and encloses a garden-court, filled with all beautiful flowers and with the memorable trees of the East; while another garden encompasses the monastery itself, and yields those honest fruits and vegetables which supply the wants of the well-cared-for mortal part of the good brothers. The island is called San Lazzaro, and the convent was established in 1717 by a learned and devoted Armenian priest named Mechithar, from whom the present order of monks is called Mechitharist. He was the first who formed the idea of educating a class of priests to act as missionaries among the

Armenian nation in the East, and infuse into its civil and religious decay the life of European piety and learning. He founded at Sebaste, therefore, a religious order, of which the seat was presently removed to Constantinople, where the friars met with so much persecution from Armenian heterodoxy that it was again transferred, and fixed at Modone in Morea. That territory falling into the hands of the Turks, the Mechitharists fled with their leader to Venice, where the Republic bestowed upon them a waste and desolate island, which had formerly been used as a place of refuge for lepers; and the monks made it the loveliest spot in all the lagoons.

The little island has such a celebrity in travel and romance that I feel my pen catching in the tatters of a threadbare theme. And yet I love the place and its people so well that I could scarcely pass it without mention. Every tourist who spends a week in Venice goes to see the convent, and every one is charmed with it and the courteous welcome of the fathers. Its best interest is the intrinsic interest attaching to it as a seat of Armenian culture; but persons who relish the cheap sentimentalism of Byron's life

find the convent all the more entertaining from the fact that he did the Armenian language the favor to study it there, a little. The monks show his autograph, together with those of other distinguished persons, and the Armenian Bible which he used to read. I understood from one of the friars, Padre Giacomo Issaverdanz, that the brothers knew little or nothing of Byron's celebrity as a poet while he studied with them, and that his proficiency as an Armenian scholar was not such as to win high regard from them.

I think most readers who have visited the convent will recall the pleasant face and manners of the young father mentioned, who shows the place to English-speaking travellers, and will care to know that Padre Giacomo was born at Smyrna, and dwelt there, in the family of an English lady, till he came to Venice and entered on his monastic life at San Lazzaro.

He came one morning to breakfast with us, bringing with him Padre Alessio, a teacher in the Armenian College in the city. As for the latter, it was not without a certain shock that I heard Mesopotamia mentioned as his birthplace, having somehow in

childhood learned to regard that formidable name as little better than a kind of profane swearing. But I soon came to know Padre Alessio apart from his birthplace, and to find him very interesting as a scholar and an artist. He threw a little grace of poetry around our simple feast by repeating some Armenian verses, — grace all the more ethereal from our entire ignorance of what the verses meant. Our breakfast-table talk wrought to friendship the acquaintance made some time before, and the next morning we received the photograph of Padre Giacomo, and the compliments of the Orient, in a heaped basket of ripe and luscious figs from the garden of the Convent San Lazzaro. When, in turn, we went to visit him at the convent, we had experience of a more curious oriental hospitality. Refreshments were offered to us as to friends, and we lunched fairily upon little dishes of rose leaves, delicately preserved, with all their fragrance, in a "lucent sirup." It seemed that this was a common conserve in the East; but we could hardly divest ourselves of the notion of sacrilege, as we thus fed upon the very most luxurious sweetness and perfume of the soul of summer. Pleasant talk ac-

companied the dainty repast, — Padre Giacomo recounting for us some of his adventures with the people whom he had to show about the convent, and of whom many were disappointed at not finding a gallery or museum, and went away in extreme disgust; and relating with a sly, sarcastic relish, that blent curiously with his sweetness and gentleness of spirit, how some English people once came with the notion that Lord Byron was an Armenian; how an unhappy French gentleman, who had been robbed in Southern Italy, would not be parted a moment from a huge bludgeon which he carried in his hand, and (probably disordered by his troubles) could hardly be persuaded from attacking the mummy which is in one of the halls; how a sharp, bustling, go-ahead Yankee rushed in one morning, rubbing his hands, and demanding, "Show me all you can in five minutes."

As a seat of learning, San Lazzaro is famed throughout the Armenian world, and gathers under its roof the best scholars and poets of that nation. In the printing-office of the convent books are printed in some thirty different languages; and a number of the fathers employ themselves constantly

in works of translation. The most distinguished of the Armenian literati now living at San Lazzaro is the Reverend Father Gomidas Pakraduni, who has published an Armenian version of Paradise Lost, and whose great labor, the translation of Homer, has been recently issued from the convent press. He was born at Constantinople of an ancient and illustrious family, and took religious orders at San Lazzaro, where he was educated, and where for twenty-five years after his consecration he held the professorship of his native tongue. He devoted himself especially to the culture of the ancient Armenian, and developed it for the expression of modern ideas; he made exhaustive study of the vast collection of old manuscripts at San Lazzaro, and then went to Paris in pursuance of his purpose, and acquainted himself with all the treasures of Armenian learning in the Bibliothèque Royale. He became the first scholar of the age in his national language, and acquired at the same time a profound knowledge of Latin and Greek.

Returning to Constantinople, Father Pakraduni, whose fame had preceded him, took up his residence in the family of a noble

Armenian, high in the service of the Turkish government; and, while assuming the care of educating his friend's children, began those labors of translation which have since so largely employed him. He made an Armenian version of Pindar, and wrote a work on Rhetoric, both of which were destroyed by fire while yet in the manuscript. He labored, meanwhile, on his translation of the Iliad, — a youthful purpose which he did not see fulfilled till the year 1860, when he had already touched the Psalmist's limit of life. In this translation he revived with admirable success an ancient species of Armenian verse, which bears, in flexibility and strength, comparison with the original Greek. Another of his great labors was the production of an Armenian Grammar, in which he reduced to rule and order the numerous forms of his native tongue, never before presented by one work in all its Eastern variety.

Padre Giacomo, to whose great kindness I am indebted for a biographic and critical notice in writing of Father Pakraduni, considers the epic poem by that scholar a far greater work than any of his philological treatises, profound and thorough as they are. When nearly completed, this poem

perished in the same conflagration which consumed the Pindar and the Rhetoric; but the poet patiently began his work anew, and after eight years gave his epic of twenty books and twenty-two thousand verses to the press. The hero of the poem is Häik, the first Armenian patriarch after the flood, and the founder of a kingly dynasty. Nimrod, the great hunter, drunk with his victories, declares himself a god, and ordains his own worship throughout the Orient. Häik refuses to obey the commands of the tyrant, takes up arms against him, and finally kills him in battle. "In the style of this poem," writes Padre Giacomo, "it is hard to tell whether to admire most its richness, its energy, its sweetness, its melancholy, its freedom, its dignity, or its harmony, for it has all these virtues in turn. The descriptive parts are depicted with the faithfullest pencil; the battle scenes can only be matched in the Iliad."

Father Pakraduni returned, after twenty-five years' sojourn at Constantinople, to publish his epic at San Lazzaro, where he still lives, a tranquil, gentle old man, with a patriarchal beauty and goodness of face. In 1861 he printed his translation of Milton,

with a dedication to Queen Victoria. His other works bear witness to the genuineness of his inspiration and piety and the diligence of his study: they are poems, poetic translations from the Italian, religious essays, and grammatical treatises.

Indeed, the existence of all the friars at San Lazzaro is one of close and earnest study; and life grows so fond of these quiet monks that it will hardly part with them at last. One of them is ninety-five years old, and, until 1863, there was a lay-brother among them whose years numbered a hundred and eight, and who died of old age, on the 17th of September, after passing fifty-eight years at San Lazzaro. From biographic memoranda furnished me by Padre Giacomo, I learn that the name of this patriarch was George Karabagiak, and that he was a native of Kutaieh in Asia Minor. He was for a long time the disciple of Dèdè Vartabied, a renowned preacher of the Armenian faith, and he afterward taught the doctrines of his master in the Armenian schools. Failing in his desire to enter upon the sacerdotal life at Constantinople, he procured his admission as lay-brother at San Lazzaro, where all his remaining days were

spent. He was but little learned; but he had a great passion for poetry, and he was the author of some thirty small works on different subjects. During the course of his long and diligent life, which was chiefly spent in learning and teaching, he may be said to have hardly known a day's sickness. And at last he died of no perceptible disorder. The years tired him to death. He had a trifling illness in August, and as he convalesced he grew impatient of the tenacious life which held him to earth. Slowly pacing up and down the corridors of the convent, he used to crave the prayers of the brothers whom he met, beseeching them to intercede with Heaven that he might be suffered to die. One day he said to the archbishop, "I fear that God has abandoned me, and I shall live." Only a little while before his death he wrote some verses, as Padre Giacomo's memorandum witnesses, "with a firm and steady hand," and the manner of his death was this, — as recorded in the grave and simple words of my friend's note: "Finally, on the 17th of September, very early in the morning, a brother, entering his chamber, asked him how he was. 'Well,' he replied, turning his face to the wall, and

spoke no more. He had passed to a better life."

It seems to me there is a pathos in the close of this old man's life, — which I hope has not been lost by my way of describing it, — and there is certainly a moral. I have read of an unlucky sage who discovered the Elixir of Life, and who, after thrice renewing his existence, at last voluntarily resigned himself to death, because he had exhausted all that life had to offer of pleasure or of pain, and knew all its vicissitudes but the very last. Brother Karabagiak seems to have had no humor to take even a second lease of life. It is perhaps as well that most men die before reaching the over-ripeness of a hundred and eight years; and, doubtless, with all our human wilfulness and ignorance, we would readily consent, if we could fix the time, to go sooner, — say, at a hundred and seven years, friends?

Besides the Convent of San Lazzaro, where Armenian boys from all parts of the East are educated for the priesthood, the nation has a college in the city in which boys intended for secular careers receive their schooling. The Palazzo Zenobia is devoted to the use of this college, where, besides

room for study, the boys have abundant space and apparatus for gymnastics and ample grounds for gardening. We once passed a pleasant summer evening there, strolling through the fragrant alleys of the garden, in talk with the father-professors, and looking on at the gymnastic feats of the boys; and when the annual exhibition of the school took place in the fall, we were invited to be present.

The room appointed for the exhibition was the great hall of the palace, which in other days had evidently been a ball-room. The ceiling was frescoed in the manner of the last century, with Cupids and Venuses, Vices and Virtues, fruits and fiddles, dwarfs and blackamoors; and the painted faces looked down on a scene of as curious interest as ever the extravagant loves and graces of Tiepolo might hope to see, when the boys of the college, after assisting at Te Deum in the chapel, entered the room, and took their places.

At the head of the hall sat the archbishop in his dark robes, with his heavy gold chain about his neck, — a figure and a countenance in all things spiritual, gracious, and reverend. There is small difference, I believe,

between the creeds of the Armenians and the Roman Catholics, but a very great disparity in the looks of the two priesthoods, which is all in favor of the former. The Armenian wears his beard, and the Latin shaves, — which may have a great deal to do with the holiness of appearance. Perhaps, also, the gentle and mild nature of the oriental yields more sweetly and entirely to the self-denials of the ecclesiastical vocation, and thus wins a fairer grace from them. At any rate, I have not seen anything but content and calm in the visages of the Armenian fathers, among whom the priest-face, as a type, does not exist, though it would mark the Romish ecclesiastic in whatever dress he wore. There is, moreover, a look of such entire confidence and unworldly sincerity in their eyes that I could not help thinking, as I turned from the portly young fathers to the dark-faced, grave, old-fashioned schoolboys, that an exchange of beard only was needed to effect an exchange of character between those youthful elders and their pupils. The gray-haired archbishop is a tall and slender man ; but nearly all the fathers take kindly to curves and circles, and glancing down a row of these amiable priests I

could scarcely repress a smile at the constant recurrence of the line of beauty in their well-rounded persons.

On the right and left of the archbishop were the few invited guests, and at the other end of the saloon sat one of the fathers, the plump key-stone of an arch of comfortable young students expanding toward us. Most of the boys are from Turkey (the Armenians of Venice, though acknowledging the Pope as their spiritual head, are the subjects of the Sultan), others are of Asiatic birth, and two are Egyptians.

As to the last, I think the Sphinx and the Pyramid could hardly have impressed me more than their dark faces, that seemed to look vaguely on our modern world from the remote twilights of old, and in their very infancy to be reverend through the antiquity of their race. The mother of these boys — a black-eyed, olive-cheeked lady, very handsome and stylish — was present with their younger brother. I hardly know whether to be ashamed of having been awed by hearing of the little Egyptian that his native tongue was Arabic, and that he spoke nothing more occidental than Turkish. But, indeed, was it wholly absurd to offer a tacit

homage to this favored boy, who must know the Arabian Nights in the original?

The exercises began with a theme in Armenian, — a language which, but for its English abundance of sibilants and a certain German rhythm, was wholly outlandish to our ears. Themes in Italian, German, and French succeeded, and then came one in English. We afterward had speech with the author of this essay, who expressed the liveliest passion for English, in the philosophy and poetry of which, it seemed, he particularly delighted. He told us that he was a Constantinopolitan, and that in six months more he would complete his collegiate course, when he would return to his native city, and take employment in the service of the Turkish Government. Many others of the Armenian students here also find this career open to them in the East.

The literary exercises closed with another essay in Armenian; and then the archbishop delivered, very gracefully and impressively, an address to the boys. After this, the distribution of the premiums — medals of silver and bronze and books — took place at the desk of the archbishop. Each boy, as he advanced to receive his premium, knelt

and touched the hand of the priest with his lips and forehead, — a quaint and pleasing ceremony which had preceded and followed the reading of all the themes.

The social greetings and congratulations that now took place ended an entertainment throughout which everybody was pleased, and the good-natured fathers seemed to be moved with a delight no less hearty than that of the boys themselves. Indeed, the ground of affection and confidence on which the lads and their teachers seemed to meet was something very novel and attractive. We shook hands with our smiling friends among the padri, took leave of the archbishop, and then visited the studio of Padre Alessio, who had just finished a faithful and spirited portrait of monsignore. Adieux to the artist and to Padre Giacomo brought our visit to an end; and so, from that scene of oriental learning, simplicity, and kindliness, we walked into our western life once more, and resumed our citizenship and burden in the Venetian world, — out of the waters of which, like a hydra or other water beast, a bathing boy instantly issued and begged of us.

A few days later our good Armenians

went to pass a month on the main-land near Padua, where they have comfortable possessions. Peace followed them, and they came back as plump as they went.

XIV

THE GHETTO AND THE JEWS OF VENICE

AS I think it extremely questionable whether I could get through a chapter on this subject without some feeble pleasantry about Shylock, and whether, if I did, the reader would be at all satisfied that I had treated the matter fully and fairly, I say at the beginning that Shylock is dead; that, if he lived, Antonio would hardly spit upon his gorgeous pantaloons or his Parisian coat, as he met him on the Rialto; that he would far rather call out to him, "*Ciò Shylock! Bon dì! Go piaser vederla;*"[1] that, if Shylock by any chance entrapped Antonio into a foolish promise to pay him a pound of his flesh on certain conditions, the honest commissary of police before whom they brought their affair would dismiss them both to the madhouse at San Servolo. In a word, the present social relations of Jew and Christian in this city render the Merchant of

[1] "Shylock, old fellow, good-day. Glad to see you."

Venice quite impossible; and the reader, though he will find the Ghetto sufficiently noisome and dirty, will not find an oppressed people there, nor be edified by any of those insults or beatings which it was once a large share of Christian duty to inflict upon the enemies of our faith. The Catholic Venetian certainly understands that his Jewish fellow-citizen is destined to some very unpleasant experiences in the next world, but *Corpo di Bacco!* that is no reason why he should not be friends with him in this. He meets him daily on exchange and at the Cassino, and he partakes of the hospitality of his *conversazioni*. If he still despises him, — and I think he does a little, — he keeps his contempt to himself; for the Jew is gathering into his own hands great part of the trade of the city, and has the power that belongs to wealth. He is educated, liberal, and enlightened, and the last great name in Venetian literature is that of the Jewish historian of the Republic, Romanin. The Jew's political sympathies are invariably patriotic, and he calls himself not Ebreo, but Veneziano. He lives, when rich, in a palace or a fine house on the Grand Canal, and he furnishes and lets many others (I must say at

rates which savor of the loan secured by the pound of flesh) in which he does not live. The famous and beautiful Ca' Doro now belongs to a Jewish family; and an Israelite, the most distinguished physician in Venice, occupies the *appartamento signorile* in the palace of the famous Cardinal Bembo. The Jew is a physician, a banker, a manufacturer, a merchant; and he makes himself respected for his intelligence and his probity, — which perhaps does not infringe more than that of Italian Catholics. He dresses well, — with that indefinable difference, however, which distinguishes him in everything from a Christian, — and his wife and daughter are fashionable and stylish. They are sometimes, also, very pretty; and I have seen one Jewish lady who might have stepped out of the sacred page, down from the patriarchal age, and been known for Rebecca, with her oriental grace and delicate, sensitive, high-bred look and bearing, — no more western and modern than a lily of Palestine.

But it is to the Ghetto I want to take you now (by the way we went one sunny day late last fall), that I may show you something of the Jewish past, which has survived

to the nineteenth century in much of the discomfort and rank savor of the dark ages.

In the fifteenth century all the riches of the Orient had been poured into the lap of Venice, and a spirit of reckless profusion took possession of her citizens. The money, hastily and easily amassed, went as rapidly as it came. It went chiefly for dress, in which the Venetian still indulges very often to the stint of his stomach; and the ladies of that bright-colored, showy day bore fortunes on their delicate persons in the shape of costly vestments of scarlet, black, green, white, maroon, or violet, covered with gems, glittering with silver buttons, and ringing with silver bells. The fine gentlemen of the period were not behind them in extravagance; and the priests were peculiarly luxurious in dress, wearing gay silken robes, with cowls of fur and girdles of gold and silver. Sumptuary laws were vainly passed to repress the general license, and fortunes were wasted and wealthy families reduced to beggary.[1] At this time, when so many worthy gentlemen and ladies had need of the Uncle to whom hard-pressed nephews fly to pledge the wrecks of prosperity, there

[1] Galliciolli, *Memorie Venete.*

was yet no Monte di Pietà, and the demand for pawnbrokers becoming imperative, the Republic was obliged to recall the Hebrews from the exile into which they had been driven some time before, that they might set up pawnshops and succor necessity. They came back, however, only for a limited time, and were obliged to wear a badge of yellow color upon the breast, to distinguish them from the Christians, and later a yellow cap, then a red hat, and then a hat of oil-cloth. They could not acquire houses or lands in Venice, nor practise any trades, nor exercise any noble art but medicine. They were assigned a dwelling-place in the vilest and unhealthiest part of the city, and their quarter was called Ghetto, from the Hebrew *nghedah*, a congregation.[1] They were obliged to pay their landlords a third more rent than Christians paid; the Ghetto was walled in, and its gates were kept by Christian guards, who every day opened them at dawn and closed them at dark, and who were paid by the Jews. They were not allowed to issue at all from the Ghetto on holidays, and two barges, with armed men, watched over them night and day, while a special magis-

[1] Mutinelli.

tracy had charge of their affairs. Their synagogues were built at Mestre, on the mainland, and their dead were buried in the sand upon the sea-shore, whither, on the Mondays of September, the baser sort of Venetians went to make merry, and drunken men and women danced above their desecrated tombs. These unhappy people were forced also to pay tribute to the state, at first every third year, then every fifth year, and then every tenth year, the privilege of residence being ingeniously renewed to them at these periods for a round sum; but, in spite of all, they flourished upon the waste and wickedness of their oppressors, waxed rich as these waxed poor, and were not again expelled from the city.[1]

There never was any attempt to disturb the Hebrews by violence, except on one occasion, about the close of the fifteenth century, when a tumult was raised against them for child-murder. This, however, was promptly quelled by the Republic before any harm was done them; and they dwelt peacefully in their Ghetto till the lofty gates of their prison caught the sunlight of modern civilization, and crumbled beneath it. Then many

[1] *Del Commercio dei Veneziani.* Mutinelli.

of the Jews came forth and fixed their habitations in different parts of the city, but many others clung to the spot where their temples still remain, and which was hallowed by long suffering, and soaked with the blood of innumerable generations of geese. So, although you find Jews everywhere in Venice, you never find a Christian in the Ghetto, which is held to this day by a large Hebrew population.

We had not started purposely to see the Ghetto, and for this reason it had that purely incidental relish, which is the keenest possible savor of the object of interest. We were on an expedition to find Sior Antonio Rioba, who has been from time immemorial the means of ponderous practical jokes in Venice. Sior Antonio is a rough-hewn statue set in the corner of an ordinary grocery, near the Ghetto. He has a pack on his back and a staff in his hand; his face is painted, and is habitually dishonored with dirt thrown upon it by boys. On the wall near him is painted a bell-pull, with the legend *Sior Antonio Rioba.* Rustics, raw apprentices, and honest Germans new to the city are furnished with packages to be carried to Sior Antonio Rioba, who is very hard to

find, and not able to receive the messages when found, though there is always a crowd of loafers near to receive the unlucky simpleton who brings them. "*E poi, che commedia vederli arrabiarsi! Che ridere!*" That is the Venetian notion of fun, and no doubt the scene is amusing. I was curious to see Sior Antonio, because a comic journal bearing his name had been published during the time of the Republic of 1848, and from the fact that he was then a sort of Venetian Pasquino. But I question now if he was worth seeing, except as something that brought me into the neighborhood of the Ghetto, and suggested to me the idea of visiting that quarter.

As we left him and passed up the canal in our gondola, we came unawares upon the church of Santa Maria dell' Orto, one of the most graceful Gothic churches in the city. The façade is exquisite, and has two Gothic windows of that religious and heavenly beauty which pains the heart with its inexhaustible richness. One longed to fall down on the space of green turf before the church, now bathed in the soft golden October sunshine, and recant these happy, commonplace centuries of heresy, and have back

again the good old believing days of bigotry, and superstition, and roasting, and racking, if only to have once more the men who dreamed those windows out of their faith and piety (if they did, which I doubt), and made them with their patient, reverent hands (if their hands *were* reverent, which I doubt). The church is called Santa Maria dell' Orto from the miraculous image of Our Lady which was found in an orchard where the temple now stands. We saw this miraculous sculpture, and thought it reflected little credit upon the supernatural artist. The church is properly that of Saint Christopher, but the saint has been titularly vanquished by the Madonna, though he comes out gigantically triumphant in a fresco above the high altar, and leads to confused and puzzling reminiscences of Bluebeard and Morgante Maggiore, to both of which characters he bears a bewildering personal resemblance.

There were once many fine paintings by Tintoretto and Bellini in this church; but as the interior is now in course of restoration, the paintings have been removed to the Academy, and we only saw one, which was by the former master, and had all his strik-

ing imagination in the conception, all his strength in the drawing, and all his lamp-black in the faded coloring. In the centre of the church, the sacristan scraped the carpenter's rubbish away from a flat tablet in the floor, and said that it was Tintoretto's tomb. It is a sad thing to doubt even a sacristan, but I pointed out that the tomb bore any name in the world rather than Robusti. "Ah!" said the sacristan, "it is just that which makes it so very curious, — that Tintoretto should wish to be buried under another name!" [1]

It was a warm, sunny day in the fall, as I said; yet as we drew near the Ghetto we noticed in the air many white, floating particles, like lazy, straggling flakes of snow. These we afterward found to be the down of multitudes of geese, which are forever plucked by the whole apparent force of the populace, — the fat of the devoted birds being substituted for lard in the kitchens of the Ghetto, and their flesh for pork. As we approached the obscene little *riva* at which we landed, a blonde young Israelite,

[1] Members of the family of Tintoretto are actually buried in this church; and no sacristan of right feeling could do less than point out some tomb as that of the great painter himself.

lavishly adorned with feathers, came running to know if we wished to see the church, — by which name he put the synagogue to the Gentile comprehension. The street through which we passed had shops on either hand, and at the doors groups of jocular Hebrew youth sat plucking geese; while within, long files of all that was mortal of geese hung from the rafters and the walls. The ground was webbed with the feet of geese, and certain loutish boys, who paused to look at us, had each a goose dragging at his heels, in the forlorn and elongated manner peculiar to dead poultry. The ground was stained with the blood of geese, and the smell of roasting geese came out of the windows of the grim and lofty houses.

Our guide was picturesque, but the most helpless and inconclusive cicerone I ever knew; and while his long, hooked Hebrew nose caught my idle fancy, and his soft blue eyes excused a great deal of inefficiency, the aimless fashion in which he mounted dirty staircases for the keys of the synagogue, and came down without them, and the manner in which he shouted to the heads of unctuous Jessicas thrust out of windows, and never gained the slightest information by his

efforts, were imbecilities that we presently found insupportable, and we gladly cast him off for a dark-faced Hebrew boy who brought us at once to the door of the Spanish synagogue.

Of seven synagogues in the Ghetto, the principal was built in 1655, by the Spanish Jews who had fled to Venice from the terrors of the Holy Office. Its exterior has nothing to distinguish it as a place of worship, and we reached the interior of the temple by means of some dark and narrow stairs. In the floor and on the walls of the passage-way were set tablets to the memory of rich and pious Israelites who had bequeathed their substance for the behoof of the sanctuary; and the sacristan informed us that the synagogue was also endowed with a fund by rich descendants of Spanish Jews in Amsterdam. These moneys are kept to furnish indigent Israelitish couples with the means of marrying, and any who claim the benefit of the fund are entitled to it. The sacristan — a little wiry man, with bead-black eyes, and of a shoemakerish presence — told us with evident pride that he was himself a descendant of the Spanish Jews. Howbeit, he was now many centuries

from speaking the Castilian, which, I had read, was still used in the families of the Jewish fugitives from Spain to the Levant. He spoke, instead, the abominable Venetian of Cannaregio, with that Jewish thickness which distinguishes the race's utterance, no matter what language its children are born to. It is a curious philological fact, which I have heard repeatedly alleged by Venetians, and which is perhaps worth noting here, that Jews speaking their dialect have not only this thickness of accent, but also a peculiarity of construction which marks them at once.

We found the contracted interior of the synagogue hardly worth looking at. Instead of having anything oriental or peculiar in its architecture, it was in a bad spirit of Renaissance art. A gallery encircled the inside, and here the women, during worship, sat apart from the men, who had seats below, running back from either side of the altar. I had no right, coming from a Protestant land of pews, to indulge in that sentimentality; but I could not help being offended to see that each of these seats might be lifted up and locked into the upright back and thus placed beyond question at

the disposal of the owner: I like the freedom and equality in the Catholic churches much better. The sacristan brought a ponderous silver key, and, unlocking the door behind the pulpit, showed us the Hebrew Scriptures used during the service by the Rabbi. They formed an immense parchment volume, and were rolled in silk upon a wooden staff. This was the sole object of interest in the synagogue, and its inspection concluded our visit.

We descended the narrow stairs, and emerged upon the piazza which we had left. It was only partly paved with brick, and was very dirty. The houses which surrounded it were on the outside old and shabby, and, even in this Venice of lofty edifices, remarkably high. A wooden bridge crossed a vile canal to another open space, where once congregated the merchants who sell antique furniture, old pictures, and objects of vertu. They are now, however, found everywhere in the city, and most of them are on the Grand Canal, where they heap together marvellous collections, and establish authenticities beyond cavil. "Is it an original?" asked a young lady who was visiting one of their shops, as she paused before an attributive

Veronese, or — what know I? — perhaps a Titian. "*Sì, signora, originalissimo!*"

I do not understand why any class of Jews should still remain in the Ghetto, but it is certain, as I said, that they do remain there in great numbers. It may be that the impurity of the place and the atmosphere is conducive to purity of race; but I question if the Jews buried on the sandy slope of the Lido, and blown over by the sweet sea wind, — it must needs blow many centuries to cleanse them of the Ghetto, — are not rather to be envied by the inhabitants of those high dirty houses and low dirty lanes. There was not a touch of anything wholesome, or pleasant, or attractive, to relieve the noisomeness of the Ghetto to its visitors; and they applauded, with a common voice, the neatness which had prompted Andrea the gondolier to roll up the carpet from the floor of his gondola, and not to spread it again within the limits of that quarter.

In the good old times when pestilence avenged the poor and oppressed upon their oppressors, what grim and dismal plagues may not have stalked by night and noonday out of those hideous streets, and passed the marble bounds of patrician palaces, and

brought to the bedsides of the rich and proud the filthy misery of the Ghetto turned to poison! Thank God that the good old times are gone and going! One learns in these aged lands to hate and execrate the past.

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